John Matheson

CLARA
ROTHWELL
ANDERSON

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By

CLARA
ROTHWELL
ANDERSON

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Dedicated to the Memory of my Father
whose Life was Devoted
to Education

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Chapter I

THE HOPE CHEST

"Save us from our friends."

HELEN WESTMAN! I positively refuse to believe that you are to marry a minister—you—of all the girls in our class—the idea is simply preposterous!"

"I agree with you, Jean, and greatly do I marvel at my own temerity; but do sit down—take this low chair—it was so good of you to come over this warm morning when you had just returned to town. Oh yes! *that* is a wedding garment," as Jean's eyes rested in admiration upon a blue silk kimono richly embroidered in pink silk chrysanthemums, which adorned the back of a chair.

"Beautiful! Simply beautiful!" exclaimed Jean enthusiastically. "But Helen, when your note arrived saying you were engaged to a minister, of no place in particular, I am free to admit that I was prostrated, nor have I yet recovered my physical and mental grip. Tell me, Helen, what impelled you to contemplate such a mad course?"

"Well, by way of introduction, . . . " began Helen.

"Mark the ministerial ring, so early acquired," interposed Jean.

"Please do not interrupt. I am firm in the conviction that our engagement is the direct result of predestination."

"Maybe so," answered Jean, "but I imagine the compelling part played by free will cannot be entirely overlooked."

"Well, perhaps not," and Helen's eyes wandered to the nodding branches of a great elm which swayed to and fro before the open window.

"You see, Jean, Angus feels that he needs me in his work. He thinks I could help him. I am not so sure of it myself . . ." added Helen hesitatingly.

"The same, age-old plea, which has misled so many a guileless female since the days of Noah!"

"O Jean! how utterly depressing and discouraging you are, and I asked you to come on purpose. I wanted to tell you about—about Angus. I thought you would be glad and that you might like to see my things," and poor Helen's voice faltered.

"I *am* glad, dear, you know I am, and I want of all things to see your trousseau. I just don't understand," and with quick repentance Jean threw her arms round Helen, pleading forgiveness.

In a wide, sunny, upper room in one of Toronto's spacious homes, the girls seated themselves on either side of a large cedar chest which had been drawn into a central place of honor in the middle of the floor. Helen's face was alight with happiness. The little, wayward curls refused to be circumspect as the exertion of bringing the box from the

clothes-press had provided an excuse for their escape, they added the last touch of charm to the sweet face with the appealing blue eyes, so expressive of sincerity and wide charity.

Jean's dark eyes, vivacious manner and variable moods betrayed a different disposition. How well the fresh, blue gingham dress and wide leghorn hat with its encircling scarlet poppies, became her.

To Helen, it was just one of the unsolvable mysteries, why Jean, so unmistakably pretty and attractive, should not ere this have a like hope chest to exhibit.

The balmy, lilac-scented breeze wafted the curtains to and fro, and stray sunbeams, filtering through the latticed windows, revealed the grey, rose-besprinkled carpet and drapings, the deep, chintz-covered chairs and ivory furniture, while the silver-tinted paper provided an artistic background for a few choice pictures which were Helen's pride.

A small, well-filled bookshelf of carefully-selected books and a reading lamp convenient to the bedside bespoke a love of reading and an occasional hour stolen from sleep.

In a proud position on the little, white writing-table stood a picture, framed heavily in silver.

A strong, clear-cut face, firmly-moulded chin and fearless eyes which looked straight ahead, unconsciously separating the gold from the dross, bespoke Celtic origin.

The casual observer was moved to a closer scrutiny of the Reverend Angus MacDonald's

countenance, upon which strength of character and reserve force were so indelibly stamped. One was wont to conclude that should this man be possessed of a vision affecting the all-round welfare of his people and the community at large no force of opposition could be brought to bear upon him which would hold him to the narrow lines of convention, or to an accepted religious theory.

"Before we begin, Jean, you must see my latest picture of Angus. *Then* you will be in a position to view the contents of my hope chest with more enthusiasm and understanding."

Removing the picture from its place of magnificent isolation, Helen gave it into the hands of Jean, tenderly, and with ill-concealed pride, as a fond mother might exhibit her proud offspring to an affectionate if somewhat critical relative.

Jean looked long and searchingly into the Highland face.

After a silence, eloquent with possibilities of approval or disapproval . . .

"Yes, Helen, I like him! He has a good face. I would trust him with my spiritual interests, and yes—my temporal affairs, which latter responsibility I might say is the supreme test of character," and a little laugh which was a half-concealed sigh, escaped her.

"Be on your guard though, Helen," she continued, further scrutinizing the pictured face. "The warlike spirit of a Scot is ever to be reckoned with. I doubt not the brave Angus could do valiant

battle should an occasion for donning his armor present itself."

"What strange things you say, Jean! But I knew you would like Angus. Everyone adores him. If you only knew the good he does. *Of course* his picture does not do him justice!"

"Marvel not at that, Helen! Pictures never do—not at this stage! Photographers are particularly unfortunate in failing to develop the facial beauty and strong points of engaged couples; but there—take Angus and put him back on the shelf—only temporarily, of course! I am consumed with curiosity to behold the contents of this box. Do you know, I firmly believe that many an unsuspecting girl, like myself, has been lured into matrimony through the apparently innocent diversion of viewing a friend's trousseau."

"If there were only *another Angus*, I would hope to awaken in you some enthusiasm along those lines, Jean, but, of course, under the circumstances, that is impossible," answered Helen in a tone of finality. "Now don't you think I've been industrious?" as throwing back the cover she proudly exposed to view the contents of her treasure box.

"Why, you must have embroidered in season and out of season," exclaimed Jean warmly, as glorified garment and household linen were displayed before her admiring gaze. "I have counted six complete sets of centrepieces and doyleys, and a sufficient number of towels to provide each individual member of the congregation with one, should it arrive

in a body. What a wealth of table and bed linen! Might I enquire, without appearing to give rein to my curiosity, whether you propose to run a rooming house as a side issue—by way of supplementing the stipend?"

"Well, I really had not considered that," laughed Helen, "but I have heard that when living in a manse it is well to be prepared for any contingency which may arise."

"Your things are lovely, Helen," pronounced Jean. "They are *in themselves alone* an incentive to matrimony. Seriously though, Helen,—you know I would not wish to hurt your feelings—but I hardly think you were called to be a minister's wife. You are—I am at a loss to express myself—so unministerial!"

"For which I am devoutly thankful," answered Helen laughingly. "You see, it is borne in upon me that did I not keep Angus MacDonald tethered to earth by a strong cord of this-worldliness, he might mount and soar away to worlds unknown, and I am not prepared to see him translated before mine eyes!"

"Don't worry, Helen," replied Jean philosophically, "you will find your ministerial husband remarkably like other men. His zeal for the cause will wax and wane in proportion to the fuel you place upon the domestic altar in the form of square meals. If he be suddenly translated it will be for lack of those, rather than from a too self-sacrificing devotion to his flock."

"Jean!" exclaimed Helen bravely, although with ill-concealed alarm over her acknowledged inexperience in housekeeping matters, "you surprise me by your worldly wisdom and your clear grasp of a domestic situation. One would suppose you were speaking from the bitter depths of experience, and that, possibly, *you* might have been instrumental in hurrying a hungry husband to his long home. Note the dirge-like effect of that alliteration; hurrying—hungry—husband—home! I feel strangely moved over the tragic possibility!"

"All right! I know I am verging on the melodramatic, Helen, but I'm so thoroughly upset over the prospect of you marrying a minister and going to live practically off the map, that I'm hardly responsible," apologized Jean, much perturbed in spirit.

"Why, Jean! you speak of me marrying a minister as if a minister were something abnormal—a distinct creation, neither god nor man, a sort of hybrid! I am simply marrying a man whose calling is that of the ministry," replied Helen convincingly.

"A nice distinction, without a difference," answered Jean, gloomily.

"No, Jean! I've thought it all out. If I were marrying a doctor, for instance, would you be torn with anxiety lest I shouldn't be fitted for my position? Would you be fearful lest I should rush madly into my husband's office, prescribe for his patients, and insist upon amputating some un-

fortunate's leg, when I had no practical knowledge of surgery or therapeutics?"

"Helen Westman! How *can* you be so utterly absurd? I am more convinced than ever that you are hardly responsible at present. What a ridiculous line of argument. You *know* they are not parallel cases."

"But they *are* parallel cases," answered Helen, emphatically. "What right have I, just because I am the wife of a minister, to prescribe for the cure of souls? I never took a degree in Theology, nor have I a clear conception of church form and procedure. I shall leave that to the minister. I want to be just like any other man's wife—trying to fill in the chinks where I can and to keep my husband up to his fittest."

"A real home-body!" deplored Jean with a sigh. "Fancy Helen Westman so hopelessly domesticated and self-effacing! I could never have believed such a complete transformation possible!"

"But then, you've never seen the magician who is responsible," laughingly responded Helen.

"It is beyond my comprehension to realize how any man could induce you to give up a career such as you might have had. You know the very best vocal teachers, and every one who heard you sing, agreed that you possessed a fortune in your voice. Why, Helen, *you could have sung before the Crowned Heads of Europe!*"

"And after that, what? According to the latest reports my prospective audience is rapidly diminish-

ing, and when I had exhausted the Crowned Heads, what then would be my unhappy fate?"

"Oh, don't be so utterly foolish!"

"'How wretched is that poor man (or woman) who hangs on princes' favors'," quoted Helen dramatically. "When verging on sixty, would you have me wed some Signor Pegalini of operatic fame and volcanic temper, and spend my declining years singing duets with him and rending the air with our declarations of love in high C?"

"Helen, you amaze me. No! I refuse to laugh with you. Truly 'too much love hath made thee mad.' I would think you should be reasonably satisfied to sing before nobility. How much higher would your vaulting ambition rise?"

"Higher, far higher," and Helen's deep, blue eyes looked far into the future, and her tone was hushed and tender.

"Listen, Jean! The height of my ambition will be realized when I sing to an audience of *one* in an old, vine-covered manse, and I will be satisfied with nothing short of the whole rose garden placed at my feet. Perhaps, sometime, I might sing for a little, sick child,—to help him forget . . .

"You know I could never preach, but I wish I could make people feel the love of God—as I feel it when I am singing . . .

"It is very *real* to me—I suppose it is because I love music so much . . ." and Helen's face was illumined as one whose ears had already been opened to the heavenly harmonies.

"It is because your heart is attuned to the Celestial music," answered Jean in an earnest, fervent tone, her great dark eyes fixed in wondering adoration on Helen's face.

"You see, Jean," continued Helen, with renewed animation, "I do not propose to give up my singing —not by any means. To be strictly truthful, I never felt so thoroughly steeped in music as I do at present. Why, I feel like singing—"

"Well, sing away by all means, while you can," interrupted her friend, her normal attitude of mind restored. "But it seems a sad waste of talent that a voice like yours should be heard by an audience of one and the sick and afflicted only," continued Jean regretfully. "However, nothing but the grim reality which waits upon experience will make any impression upon you. I imagine I see you out of the depths of your wisdom and knowledge, advising and admonishing the mothers of your husband's flock!"

"You'll never see that," answered Helen with determination, "so you may save your imagination the strain. On the contrary, *I* may learn things from *them*."

"You may depend upon it, you will—a free and liberal education will be yours!"

"Now, Jean, your treatment of the subject does not conduce to a peaceful and unruffled state of mind such as is becoming to the proposed wife of a minister. Let us go downstairs, I'm consumed with thirst and I'll make a nice, cooling drink," urged

Helen, hospitably. "I want to show you a lovely cloth I am making—it's the sweetest thing . . ."

"You would be employing your time much more profitably if you were to concentrate upon the Bible commentaries and the philosophy of Kant, endeavoring at the same time to gain a smattering of Greek and Hebrew," advised Jean, learnedly.

"Almost you turn me from my noble purpose; you have kept your most convincing and overwhelming argument to the last! But come, let us have a chocolate ice, it may produce a mellowing effect upon you, and partially restore my shattered self-confidence."

With arms entwined, they descended the broad stairway.

"Who knows, Jean? You may adorn a manse yourself, yet. Stranger things have happened."

"*Never!* while the world stands!" emphatically declared Jean. "*No one could ever induce me.* I propose to live my own life in my own way. I refuse to be at the beck and call of a number of uninteresting people who have a perfect genius for getting into trouble, and who insist upon being sick at all kinds of inconvenient seasons. It's bad enough for *you* to marry a minister and grow *frowsy* and *dippy* in the skirt!"

"Oh, how utterly ridiculous you are, Jean!" laughingly answered Helen. "In all charity, I hope the 'dippiness' will be confined to my skirt. I shouldn't like to think that the hang of my skirt might have a psychological effect upon my brain to

the extent of producing mental dippiness! You wouldn't suggest such a horrible possibility, would you, Jean?"

"Helen, you're a dear! You know we all adore you! Angus MacDonald should fall down upon his knees in gratitude for his wife that-is-to-be," pronounced Jean, with ill-concealed emotion.

"And at the same time, Helen Westman should fall upon her knees and render thanks for her husband that-is-to-be," humbly responded Helen.

"Well, as there seems to be nothing else in order apart from the benediction, which I am not prepared to offer, I shall depart and leave you to your fate. No, no thank you! When mentally disturbed I refrain from eating and drinking. No, not even the prospect of a chocolate ice can shake my stern resolve," added Jean firmly, tilting her hat at a more becoming angle over the shining black strands of her hair.

"You will come and visit us as soon as we are settled, you really must, Jean. Come and see for yourself how far your dismal prophecies have been fulfilled," urged Helen, as she bade a loving "Goodbye" to her dearest girlhood friend, whose solicitude for her happiness she well knew was heartfelt and genuine.

"If only dad and mother were not leaving so soon for Europe, to be away two endless years, my cup would overflow," sighed Helen, as she returned to her room to once more place in order the contents of the precious hope chest.

Chapter II

HELEN WESTMAN

"A creature not too bright and good,
For human nature's daily food,
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles."

THE large, cheerful living-room in which Helen Westman and Jean Sinclair had bade one another a reluctant good-bye, commanded a view of the winding river which stretched away towards the blue hills in the distance. All the appointments and furnishings of the room emphasized the fact that refinement and exquisite taste had united to form an ideal home, and here Helen Westman had grown from babyhood to early womanhood, the only child and idol of devoted parents.

They had provided her with a liberal education, and being remarkably talented, her fond friends—of whom Jean Sinclair was her earliest and most devoted—were wont to prophesy for her an outstanding career.

Perhaps she would not have been pronounced beautiful. Her features were hardly regular enough for actual beauty, but when she smiled her whole face was illumined. She possessed great charm of manner, brightness and vivacity, to which was

added a profound sense of humor. A sweet disposition and an unfailing supply of optimism, rendered her popularity assured.

Imagine then, the consternation which reigned in her immediate circle, when, after a short visit paid to an aunt in a distant village, Helen's engagement was announced. She had consented to drowse away her days (as her friends woefully predicted) in the sleepy, vine-covered manse at Bloomfield—the wife of Rev. Angus MacDonald, "for better for worse—for richer for poorer—" certainly for poorer they all agreed, if wealth is to be measured by stipends, which latter term, by the way, has a gripping, grinding ring, suggestive of failing crops, lean kine and famine!

Great injustice has been done to the word, however.

The term "stipend" was chosen from the very delicacy of its significance, and in reality does not carry with it the vulgar force of the word "salary." Quite the contrary. It conveys rather the lofty and exalted idea of a gratuity, or, in modern, up-to-date parlance, a bonus. It is difficult to make clear, but a "stipend" can best be described as something granted, not by way of tendering payment for value received, but proffered more as a delicate suggestion that while body and soul are still united, it is essential that the former should receive some slight consideration—not, of course, too much, lest it flourish and expand at the expense of the latter!

Generally speaking, great delicacy and consideration has ever been evinced by those whose duty it has been to administer these bonuses, and it is no more than due to them that they should receive their meed of praise.

Angus MacDonald, of Bloomfield, was already familiar with a soul-searching experience in the life of his predecessor, Rev. John Fearman, who was greatly inconvenienced at times through the non-appearance of the much-needed bonus. Naturally he was thus hampered in his praiseworthy attempt to carry out the Biblical injunction to "owe no man anything." So great was his temerity, that, goaded on by his sufferings he finally made known to the assembled officials, the precarious condition in which he found himself.

Up rose Simon Grabbe, filled with righteous indignation.

"I thought, Sir, it was *souls* you were working for. It don't look well for ministers to be talking about money, it don't. It's unrighteous Mammon, it is! Ministers should keep clear of it—it's defiling for them!"

In proud and perspiring assurance of having done his bit, Simon collapsed into a near-by chair, exhausted by his laudable effort to do his duty and defend the faith at all costs.

According to report, the Reverend John Fearman rose to his feet to administer sound doctrine in no uncertain tone.

"Sir," said he, "I *do* work for souls, but I cannot

eat souls, and if I *could*, it would take a thousand such as yours to make a square meal—providing I could relish them!" he added, doubtfully.

It was never made known to the public, but a couple of hams and a bag of potatoes deposited at the manse next day, went far to prove that the combination of reproof and doctrine administered to the over-zealous Simon, had produced a sanctifying effect upon him, and enlarged his vision mightily,—for the time being at least.

Fortunately, the opposite type of official was also well represented in Bloomfield—considerate, self-sacrificing, and ever ready to place the comfort and welfare of the minister before his own. To be sure, the Simon Grabbe element was far from extinct, but then there was ever the possibility that such narrowness might some day be widened.

The charge at Bloomfield was situated in the midst of a farming district which was a veritable garden. Large, substantial brick houses, bank barns and windmills rose on every hand, and the whole countryside impressed one with the idea that here, in old Ontario, dwelt a people whom God had blessed abundantly in their sowing and in their reaping—"theirs was a goodly heritage."

The Rev. Angus MacDonald, although comparatively new in the field of labor, already possessed in no small degree the love and confidence of his people.

To him they brought their problems and their difficulties. Fathers reluctantly confided to him

the fear lest they lose their jobs, and those dependent suffer hardship. The widowed mother, with heart sore on account of a son's waywardness, poured out to him her fears, as the hard-wrung tears of approaching age coursed down her worn cheeks. The bereaved and sorrow-stricken leaned heavily upon him for sympathy and consolation, and one and all who came to the minister to lay their burdens at his feet, went their separate ways comforted and strengthened, their faith in God renewed.

The gospel of loving helpfulness and service which he preached to them on a Sabbath day was exemplified during the week by his sympathy, his hopeful attitude towards life, and his outstretched hand ever ready to succor the needy or uplift the fallen. Combined with this, the Rev. Angus MacDonald possessed a wide and far-reaching vision which looked to the upbuild of his people.

He preached to them a fourfold gospel.

"Ye shall have life—and have it more abundantly."

Spiritual life—mental life—social life—physical life.

Abundant life which would resolve itself into terms of loving service and render a community safe for the body and soul expansion of the child. An habitual level of Christian faith, resolving into good works which made no provision for a fall from grace, and encouraged the child, made in the image of God, to go on to perfection in an environment so conducive to its highest well-being and development.

It really was not to be marvelled at after all, that Helen Westman had been induced to become the wife of a minister; that is, of this minister in particular.

A firmly moulded mouth and well-defined features revealed a strength of character which Helen, with her more pliable nature, realized would prove to her a strong tower should she be obsessed with moments of weakness and uncertainty. She could trust his judgment on all occasions—Angus would be sure to know the right thing to do under all circumstances. A peaceful conclusion and one which would make for long life and domestic happiness—a rare attitude of mind in these latter days!

Poor Helen suffered much at the hands of her friends, one and all, who seemed to feel that it devolved upon them to magnify her future position and exalt her to a Mount Pisgah elevation. The thought of her new life filled her with many misgivings and much trepidation.

She was fearful, lest after all she had no vocation for a minister's wife. Was she about to climb into the sheep-fold (if so a manse can be designated) by the wrong door? Alas! what a day of reckoning would be hers when Angus would discover his mistake and repent him of his choice.

Perish the thought!

Angus met with marked success in combating Helen's arguments and quieting her fears, as he pictured the life of usefulness which he could lead

with her by his side to strengthen his hands and encourage him at his work.

Among Helen's precious possessions for her new life figured largely a book, entitled, "Handy Recipes and Hints for Housekeepers."

It was the work of a most estimable woman and exemplary housekeeper by the name of Wise. Helen pored over its pages and drank deeply of the wisdom therein contained. She was greatly impressed by the housewifely prowess displayed by Mrs. Wise, whose morning work was invariably done at half past nine! At that hour, the potatoes and turnips would be discovered standing in salted water on the summer kitchen table, and twice a week a batch of bread could be found cooling under the ironing blanket, while the virtuous Mrs. Wise, herself, would be seated in calm serenity darning the socks of Mr. Wise!

Helen marvelled much how the husband of so wonderful a housekeeper, whose eternal vigilance should have guarded against any such lamentable contingency, *dared* to have a hole in his sock! It was out of keeping with the domestic scheme of perfection and most inconsiderate and shiftless on the part of the aforementioned Mr. Wise.

Helen did not know that the estimable Mrs. Wise had decreed that no shoes should track her immaculate kitchen, and this mandate placed an unwonted responsibility on the aforesaid socks. And so it came about that her humble and obedient husband literally took the shoes from off his feet

before entering his wife's presence. We fear, however, that his homage could hardly be traced to an over-exalted reverence for cleanliness.

Alas no! A "peace at any price" policy, rather than a desire to emulate the Beatitudes had rendered Adam Wise a peacemaker, and dearly had his long-drawn-out sufferings earned the accompanying blessing. This last, however, is personal history, known to the few but suspected by the many.

In the last analysis, people whose every movement is regulated by the clock, who can be accused of no shortcoming whether in word or deed, are doubtless a very excellent and praiseworthy folk and their example greatly to be emulated. But may we be mercifully delivered from living under the same roof with such perfection! A measure of elasticity in domestic affairs is so much more comfortable to all concerned.

Such was Helen's conclusion after a long and thorough study of "Handy Hints to Housekeepers."

Her imagination pictured many possible occasions when good housekeeping of an exacting nature might require to give way to comfortable conditions of living.

Chapter III

THE HOMECOMING

"Here comes the lady."

ON a perfect evening in late June, when the lowering sun was tinting the hill tops with purple and gold, and the air was sweet with the fragrance of a thousand summer blooms, Angus MacDonald and his bride arrived at the little wayside station of Bloomfield.

As is the custom of so many stations in rural districts, the distributing depot stopped short a mile and a half from the village proper, and in order to reach this destination it was necessary to take a perilous journey in a top-heavy vehicle proudly referred to as the "bus." Should a number of passengers require to be transported to the village at the same time, they sat on either side, their knees meeting in close fellowship, but were the number limited to one or two, theirs was indeed an unhappy fate. They were pitched to and fro and thrown violently into one another's arms as the clumsy equipage lurched from side to side in a mad rush to the village.

Imagine the relief which Angus experienced when, instead of being forced to take his bridal journey in this undignified manner, he espied one of his

managers driving round the corner of the station, his visage radiant with a broad, welcoming smile.

A high-seated democrat was drawn by two white horses, groomed and resplendent for the occasion. Their ears were literally smothered in large white peonies, bunches of which were also interwoven with the evergreens adorning the bridal carriage.

The moving spirit of this glorified vehicle was Donald McClintock, elder and manager of Bloomfield Church.

A man he was,—staunch and true to his traditions —and established in all good works.

Strange to say, the decorative instinct was strongly developed within him. This was borne out by the much-betrimmed carriage and still further by the striking garments in which he was arrayed.

One weakness had this generous and irreproachable son of the soil—

It expressed itself in *checks*.

The large, bold designs in black and white with which he attired himself, set forth in startling relief his broad and noble proportions.

"Angus," whispered Helen, as the animated checker board disappeared behind the station, "whatever do you suppose induced Mr. McClintock to buy that awful suit of second mourning, or whatever it is? Has he lost his wife?" she enquired sympathetically.

"No, little girl," replied her husband, cheerfully,

"Alas, he has no wife as yet. He has been considering it, though, for the last decade, so they say!"

"But why does he wear such conspicuous mourning?"

"Because he has no wife, I rather suspect. At least, I know a man who would wear black and white checks, too, if he had failed to secure a certain little girl for his wife," fondly responded Angus.

"Well, I've not lived in vain if I've saved you from such a dismal fate," suggested Helen, reassuringly.

There was no mistaking the welcome in the hearty handclasp, and kindly spoken words of Donald.

"Come this way, Ma'am! Can you reach the step?—there—it's a shade high. When I get a woman of my own I'll have to bring that step down a peg," he volunteered, cheerfully, as he helped Helen on to the conspicuous elevation of the seat.

"Where's the minister off to? Not cleared out, already, I hope."

"Oh no, Mr.—Mr. McClintock, don't suggest such a horrible possibility. I think he must be around the back of the station looking after the luggage. Oh yes, there he comes with my bird—he is not smothered, is he Angus? Poor little Dick. Give him to me—I'll hold the cage."

"You just jump in beside your Missis, Mr. MacDonald, and I'll heave in what I can and come back for another load. You brought back a sight more baggage than you took away—not counting your woman," commented Donald cheerfully.

Angus laughed heartily, and a few, who still lingered round the station out of curiosity, marvelled greatly that a minister should give way to such unseemly mirth,—but excused him under the circumstances.

"Now, beauties! move on!" and Donald flourished his whip in mid-air.

Move on, the beauties did.

No one would have suspected them capable of the speed with which they rounded the corner into the main road, leading to the village.

Helen, bird-cage and all, was precipitated in a most undignified manner into her husband's arms. The canary, sensing an atmosphere of general rejoicing, lifted up his voice in full-throated melody.

As they drove along, the peace of the evening hour and the quiet countryside hushed their very souls. On the green hillside the cows wandered well content, nipping here and there a bunch of tender, white clover.

An unwary colt, venturing too near the road which skirted his pasture, and taking sudden fright at their approach, speeded back to the safe shelter of his mother's side.

A laborer, his day's toil finished, quickened his pace homeward, as he thought of the waiting board and the welcome of wife and child.

Passing one of the highly cultivated farms, an old man was seen at the door of a time-worn log cabin. The imposing, brick structure in the next field bespoke prosperity and the reward of labor.

But, as Angus explained to Helen, at the evening hour old Jamie Douglas was wont to wend his way back to the lonely house, and seated on the crumbling threshold of the deserted home which his own hands had fashioned, smoke his pipe of uncertain hue, while his thoughts were busy with the past.

On just such an evening in June he had brought his bride here, he reflected, as he knocked the bowl of his pipe on the worn door sill, in process of cleaning.

The twin maples at the gate were planted that day.

"Ah, but those were happy days—ups and downs like other folks, to be sure—somehow the place wasn't just the same since Mother went on. Oh well, they wouldn't be separated much longer," he comforted himself, as rising heavily he went on his way, the old memories making music in his heart.

"Angus, this place is *finished—absolutely finished.* It is perfect. What work can you possibly hope to accomplish here?" was Helen's comment and inquiry as they drove along the peaceful country roads.

"Not so finished as you might imagine, Helen. There are many things that can be done yet by way of completion," and the minister's voice betrayed a purpose in view.

As they approached the village they discovered that it had taken on a gala appearance for their reception. A few of the more ambitious had even

ventured to hang out flags in welcome; others waved their handkerchiefs, and little children threw flowers under the horses' feet.

Helen's warm, appreciative nature was deeply moved.

Main Street pursued its tortuous and rather erratic way past imposing residence and retiring cottage alike. The blacksmith's shop and bank rose side by side in unquestioned social companionship. The one general store emitted a strong aroma of ham, cheese and coal oil blended together.

A white brick church across to the right lifted its tall spire heavenward, and in the near distance another church of ivy-clad grey stone appeared in sight. In its kindly shelter rose the old, vine-covered manse, waiting to open its hospitable doors to the minister and his young bride.

The vicinity of the church showed signs of unwonted activity. Many stood around outside the door, in a welcoming attitude, while people on foot and horses and rigs were approaching from every direction.

"Look, Helen—there is the church—and the manse next door . . . *our home.*" Angus added, in a voice, tense with suppressed emotion.

Helen answered by a pressure of her husband's hand.

Suddenly, an old cemetery, with its crumbling stones and overgrown graves, came into view.

"Oh Angus! what a strange place for a cemetery. I hope it does not reach as far as the manse."

"It does straggle round the back of the church and along one side of the manse," admitted Angus reluctantly.

"Oh Angus, how awful! but perhaps I'll get used to it," suggested Helen bravely.

"The old cemetery is one of our livest problems. Many a warlike engagement centres round it," remarked the minister.

"That reminds me, Mr. MacDonald," interrupted Donald, "Bob Jenkins says that plot to the south by the maples shouldn't have been took over by the Blinkses, and he says he'll dig 'em up root and branch yet, as the plot is his and he's set on having it for himself!"

"Peace be to his ashes," responded Angus, fervently.

As the minister and his bride drove up to the church where the congregation had assembled to welcome them, Helen realized that her hour was indeed at hand. A harrowing and soul-searching experience awaited her—she was about to be introduced to her husband's people. Imagine her relief when one after another approached to greet her with a kindly welcome in their faces and a hearty hand-clasp. It really didn't seem so bad after all, this being a minister's wife, Helen decided, as an elderly man with a kindly, sorrow-carved face came forward to welcome them.

"Well, Mr. MacDonald," said he, after some hesitation, "we are a proud people this day. You have done well by yourself—and by us, too, I'm

thinking. I hope your wife may long be left by your side," he added falteringly, as he took Helen's hand in his warm, welcoming grasp.

Here, his eyes involuntarily strayed beyond the open window. In the waning light he could see the quiet graveyard where, so many weary years ago, he had laid his young wife to her early rest.

Angus, who well knew of his faithful elder's life sorrow, held the toil-worn hand with a loving, sympathetic grip while, for the moment a cold fear tugged at his heartstrings.

If it were Helen, *his* wife, lying out there amidst the damp chill of the crumbling gravestones! God forbid! Could *he* carry on as Duncan MacCallum had done, throughout all the lonely years, his faith in God unshaken?

And here the minister of Bloomfield Church realized that while he ministered unto his people, *they likewise ministered unto him.*

At this juncture, Mrs. McClusky, a woman of noble proportions and ruddy countenance, bore down upon the bridal pair. So grotesque and disfiguring was the hat she wore that it might have been selected for her by her bitterest enemy, decided Helen.

"So this is your woman, Mr. MacDonald," taking Helen's hand in her enveloping grip and wringing it heartily.

"This is my wife, Mrs. McClusky," answered the minister, looking proudly down at the young girl by his side, at the wistful blue eyes and the

little head covered with golden hair which held a worldly kink in every shining curl.

"Well, I must say you've made a good choice as far as looks go," decided the kind-hearted parishioner. "Poor lamb! she'll need caring for, she will," looking compassionately at the young bride. "I can see it in her eyes. Be good to her while you've got her. I can see she wouldn't bear up long if she were set upon—that she wouldn't," she added emphatically, patting Helen's hand lovingly.

"Mrs. McClusky," answered Angus, as nearly indignant as a minister dare be, "no doubt you mean kindly, but I do not require to be told to cherish my wife," his head held high and his eyes flashing ominously.

"Oh well, Mr. MacDonald," continued Mrs. McCluskey unabashed, "no harm intended I am sure. I've lived longer than you and seen how matches turn out. You are a likely enough man for a husband as husbands go, which all have their shortcomings. It's God's truth I've laid out and helped box many a poor soul who wouldn't be lying out there to-night, crumbling away, if their men had given them a pat once in a while, and a loving word, instead of cooling off like a flat iron once they took them away from their own folks."

Helen unconsciously clutched her husband's arm, and her beseeching eyes met his in mute appeal. The reassuring smile which was her answer scattered her doubts and fears to the winds.

The minister and his bride were now conducted

to a seat of honor to enjoy the programme which was to precede the supper.

One musical selection which impressed itself upon them was worthy of more than passing note. The song and chorus was rendered by an entire family comprising father, mother and a numerous offspring in different stages of growth and development.

It was a solemn and inspiring sight to behold this sorely afflicted family group, lined up, and pouring out their woes in no uncertain tone. This, surely, was the hour of their extremity and they were ill prepared to stand up under the weight of their financial difficulties.

They had come to the inevitable conclusion that the hour was at hand when "*They'd have to Mortgage the Farm.*"

They wailed forth their intentions, individually and collectively—in accents loud and stentorian as if it were a foregone conclusion and the mortgage about to be signed—in tones dulcet and pleading as though they fain would avert such an impending but inevitable calamity.

"*The farm, the farm, the dear, old farm,*
We'll have to mortgage the farm,
We'll have to mortgage the farm."

The audience appeared much moved over the truly deplorable condition in which this poor but apparently deserving family found themselves placed.

Helen sincerely trusted that the effort to con-

tribute towards the minister's stipend was not going to be instrumental in calling down upon the heads of this unfortunate family such dire disaster, mentally deciding that the selection, to say the least of it, was ill-advised. A dirge of that description might possibly affect the more timorous ones to lesser giving, fearing that such generosity might eventually entail financial ruin, and in course of a few short years, the necessity of mortgaging the farm to pay their church dues.

The programme of songs and recitations being over, the guests of honor were conducted to the head of the long supper table which stretched the whole length of the room.

In the centre rose proudly the large, frosted bride's cake and the whole length of the hospitable board was bestrewn and bedecked with bridal wreaths. Here and there were bowls of crimson-hued peonies and bewildering June roses. Truly the supper was "a feast for the gods!"

Such an unfailing and generous supply of cold chicken must have entailed a veritable slaughter of the innocents. Cakes and pies—doughnuts and cookies—tarts and biscuits—pickles and jellies—followed one another in quick succession down the length of the table and disappeared, only to be replaced by more marvellous confections.

A seat of honor next to the bride had been reserved for Dr. Rolston, the popular young physician of Bloomfield, who entered when the feast was

nearly concluded. He shook hands heartily with the minister.

"We are delighted to welcome you back, Mr. MacDonald. Sincerest congratulations!" wringing his hand and turning to the bride.

Angus returned his welcome with equal warmth and hastened to introduce Helen.

"This is my wife, Dr. Rolston," he proudly announced. "The Doctor and I are old friends, Helen, we batched together a couple of summers."

"Oh, I have heard my husband speak of you so frequently, Dr. Rolston, I really feel quite well acquainted," answered Helen, holding out her hand and smiling up at him with that confiding, appealing manner which never failed to establish confidence. "I do hope that you will be as good friends as ever! You won't mind me, will you?—that is—"

"On the contrary, Mrs. MacDonald," answered the doctor reassuringly, "I have already decided that you are going to have one very exacting member of your congregation—the kind who comes early and often, and sits long after the last vestige of excuse for remaining has been exhausted."

"You can never come too often, old chap. The manse door is always open to you," replied the minister, heartily, as Helen's attention was claimed in another direction.

"You *are* lucky, old fellow! I am glad for you. You know I mean it—but, forgive me. 'It is a bitter thing to look into happiness through another man's eyes,'" he quoted, dejectedly.

"Oh, brace up, Doctor! I wouldn't give up hope if I were you," said Angus cheerfully.

"No, Mr. MacDonald, there is no use deceiving myself into a forlorn hope; you know and I know *it can never be*, so help me!" he breathed, inaudibly.

As Mr. and Mrs. MacDonald were leaving the festive board to receive the address of welcome, Helen's passing attention was drawn to a tall, raw-boned, determined-looking woman, a veritable Amazon, who was declaiming to a mild, inoffensive man wearing a hunted, run-to-ground expression.

"Hm, puny looking! Don't see what he saw in her! no back-bone to her!"

In reply, Helen overheard,

The minister should have took you, Amanda—he should! 'Tain't no fault of yours he didn't, so it ain't! You'd have been a minister's wife we could have *looked up to* and *feared*—you would! Besides, there's your fine Jersey cow he'd have had as well!"

Helen heard no more, but enough to realize that there was at least one woman in her husband's congregation who did not appreciate her strong points and who was not prepared to receive her with open arms.

The Rev. John Matheson from the neighboring charge of Beresford had been delayed and only now arrived. As a personal friend of Mr. MacDonald, and as his nearest neighbor, he was called upon to present the words of welcome.

In a few well-chosen words to both minister and

people he welcomed Mrs. MacDonald to her new home. That he was sincere in his congratulations none could doubt.

John Matheson was one of those rare individuals who could not assume an aspect foreign to his attitude of mind.

As Angus MacDonald rose to reply, the people sprang to their feet and the old church basement rang with cheers and hand clappings. The minister voiced as best he could the deep appreciation of himself and his young wife, and expressed the hope that he would now be in a position to do a two-fold work.

As John Matheson took his seat Helen watched him and decided that his manner inspired confidence. He was a man of about forty years of age and possessed a striking appearance and strong personality. His heavy, brown, refractory hair was inclined to unministerial waves. His forehead was broad and his dark, grey eyes deeply set. A nose, straight and prominent, and strong jaw and chin bespoke strength of character while a firmly-moulded mouth was softened by little lines of gentle smiling, engraved by many a sweet and tender thought. Such, in brief, was John Matheson.

"Is his wife here, Angus?" whispered Helen.

"No, unfortunately John is not married. He is a fine chap—none better. Just one failing—he does not care for women, that is,—he does not specialize."

"What a pity! I'm sure I should like him!"

"I'm glad he didn't get in on me then, dear,"

whispered Angus, with feigned anxiety, "I wouldn't have had a look in with old John in the field."

"Angus! how absurd! I mean, I would like him for some one else."

"Oh, I see. Well, you precious little match-maker, you can do nothing with John Matheson; he is rooted and grounded in single blessedness; he loves his flowers, his library and his pictures, and is devoted to his people, and as to their interests, he has wrought miracles of reform."

"But it seems a pity, doesn't it, Angus?"

"It does, indeed! If it could only be brought home to John what he is missing! But he seems to bear up with great fortitude. Wait till your friend, Jean Sinclair comes—then we will see . . ."

"Angus MacDonald! You dear, blundering, old thing! Jean Sinclair! The last person in the world! Why, if you only knew how she felt about me marrying you, Angus. She can't endure ministers and I can't imagine why, for, although she seldom speaks of it her own father was a minister."

"Well, don't worry, Helen. John is not likely to enthuse over the idea any more than your friend; but there he is coming over to us—do not wax too enthusiastic over him!"

These disjointed remarks had taken place at intervals while the Rev. John Matheson pursued his tortuous way through the disarranged chairs to the side of the honored guests. Shaking the hand of Angus heartily, he turned to the bride.

"Mrs. MacDonald, allow me to welcome you to

Bloomfield. I count your husband as a valued friend of mine."

"I have heard him laud you to the skies," responded Helen, brightly, as she took his extended hand. "He is vitally interested in the work you have accomplished in your congregation. According to my husband, you have levelled the mountains and builded up the valleys," added Helen impulsively, her bright face alight with enthusiasm.

"Hardly that, Mrs. MacDonald," laughed John Matheson. "I may have attempted to level a mountain or so, but as to building up the valleys—that is a slow process."

"Now, John," interrupted Angus, whose attention had been claimed in another direction, "remember the latch of Bloomfield Manse hangs on the outside for you."

"Do come! Just as you always did, won't you, Mr. Matheson," urged Helen graciously, smiling sweetly up into his face.

"It will give me the greatest pleasure, Mrs. MacDonald," and no one could doubt the sincerity of his tone.

The reception was over at last, and ere long the congregation had disappeared down the winding, leafy roads which led to their various homes.

The minister and his bride had crossed the threshold of their own home and stood in the bow window of the manse, gazing down the long road and listening to the last, departing hoof-beat.

Life seemed to stretch far beyond, down the winding pathway of time. They were to journey together—always together. Angus MacDonald bowed his head in thanksgiving.

"What could he render unto the Lord for all his benefits."

The minister's heart was very full of gratitude as he held his young wife in the sacred shelter of his protecting arm.

Suddenly, a weird, penetrating sound broke the stillness of the night.

"Oh, Angus! what can it be? That awful wail! How terribly black the country is at night," whispered Helen fearfully, clinging closer to her husband.

"Why that is only a whip-poor-will out in the churchyard, don't be afraid, you foolish child," and Angus held her tightly in his arms.

"How sad and—and funereal it sounds! Does he often sing, or moan, or whatever it is? You don't believe in omens, do you, Angus? You are so wise and—and sure of things."

"No—no, you poor little girl, you are trembling—and all for fear of a harmless whip-poor-will! Why, they sing themselves to sleep every night over here in the graveyard," answered Angus, reassuringly. "You'll soon get used to them."

Nothing comforted at the revelation, Helen but clung closer, as a black silence, vocal with the weird cry of the bird enveloped them.

"Angus, my husband, you *will be good to me al-*

ways, won't you, dear," she whispered, tremblingly. "I don't mean just when—when—I don't make mistakes and things, and the way is easy, like now, you know; you *will* be patient with me, won't you, Angus?" she implored. "I may be quite cross at times, and perhaps unreasonable and—and my judgment fail, but you are warned! If I thought you would ever scold me or be cross to me like—like that old lady spoke of in the church, I would rather lie out there in the darkness to-night, where the whip-poor-will is moaning—*now*, while I know that you love me."

"Helen, my precious wife, how can you think of such a thing! You are worn out, my poor little girl! Why, your happiness is more to me than anything in the world. You can always be sure of that. If I fail to make you happy, it is because I don't know how—so help me God," he breathed in silent prayer, as he carried his wife up the broad stairway in his strong, sheltering arms, comforted and soothed as a tired child.

Chapter IV

THE FIRST MORNING IN THE MANSE

"O happy home where thou art loved the dearest."

THE midnight dirge of the whip-poor-will held no prophetic note for Helen when the bright June morning dawned and the dew-washed scarlet roses rambled their way in through the open French window of the dining room, in their ill-concealed curiosity to behold the sweet, young mistress of the manse.

"Oh, Angus! what a beautiful old place! You never told me half of its beauty. How perfectly lovely the people were to us last night, too. I do hope for your sake they liked me," and a little, anxious sigh escaped Helen.

"Cheer up, Helen—I'm willing to risk it. You have John Matheson hard and fast, already."

"Well, I certainly like him. That reminds me, Angus, what kind of a girl is some one named Amanda, I think her name is Amanda, she has many valued possessions, and is the proud owner of a Jersey cow?" and with face averted Helen busied herself, unpacking some of her wedding china for breakfast.

"Amanda Softly! How could you have possibly

heard of her at this early stage?" enquired Angus, in open surprise.

"Oh, well, you see a girl cannot possess all the manifold graces and qualifications needful for a minister's wife, and yet remain entirely obscure," and Helen's bright, blue eyes beamed mischievously. "I trust, Angus, you have made no mistake," she added with serious concern. "You really should have chosen a wife who could have brought you great possessions, and alas, I have only poor, little Dickie."

"Now see here, Helen, you know it would not have affected my choice if Amanda Softly or any other girl owned the cattle on a thousand hills and possessed a following of sheep and goats as long as the patriarchal possessions."

"Oh, what a sweeping statement from my canny old Scot," laughed Helen. "I do hope you won't grow too serious minded, Angus, it is deadly to matrimonial bliss, and some men, when they get old, get very cross, and never see a joke at all unless they make it themselves."

"I hope your worst fears will not be fulfilled for some years yet, but I admit it is difficult to appreciate the full force of a joke before breakfast. I think the kitchen fire is fairly under way now."

"Why, of course, you poor thing, you are hungry! Just one more glance at that dear, old fireplace, Angus, how big and hospitable it looks. It is fairly holding out its arms to receive us—the room is full of possibilities. I can see the big couch Jean

gave us pulled up in front of the fire on a cold night in winter. Along the sides will be our bookshelves—and there is the very corner for my baby grand!"

Speechless with admiration, Helen collapsed into a nearby chair.

"And to crown it all," added Angus, "there is the special piece of furniture which I chose myself; I am rather proud of it, it can't be duplicated. Let me show it to you," and he led the unsuspecting Helen to the looking glass which adorned the hat-rack.

"Oh, how disappointing! I really thought you had picked up some nice little piece of antique."

"No chance," laughed her husband. "I am not enthusiastic over antiques—to that extent."

"What's that awful smoke?" enquired Helen in sudden alarm.

"Oh, just the kitchen stove. It suffers from chronic-pulmonary trouble. In my long-lost bachelor days, I had been in the habit of taking my physical exercises through fanning it for half an hour every morning with the dustpan. I'll just give it a few turns now," seizing the improvised bellows. "Its worst spasms are over, however, and the porridge water is boiling at last.

"Now, Helen! The supreme moment in our matrimonial career is at hand. I want to ask you a very serious question—*Can you make porridge? Oatmeal porridge?* the only kind of porridge worthy of a true son of Scotia!"

"Angus, you positively startled me. I will do my best. I can make something which I sincerely hope will meet with your approval, the more especially since my future happiness seems to depend upon its flavor."

The dining table had been drawn in to its smallest, cosiest capacity, and the pink rosebud china was proudly set forth on the spotless linen. A basket of half-opened peonies occupied the centre of the table, and the silver breakfast service of just the right size for two, provided the "homey" touch as Angus MacDonald proudly led his young wife to her seat of honor.

"I feel as if I were being inducted, Angus."

"Installed, beyond a doubt, Helen," said he, as he took the opposite seat, where he could best see the changing expressions on his wife's sweet, morning face.

That first breakfast was a long-to-be-remembered feast!

If the blessing were less perfunctory and more a form of worship than is its wont, it was not to be marvelled at.

At the crucial moment, the salt-box had been discovered to be empty. However, the porridge lost none of its ambrosial flavor through the lack of it. When the stodgy, saltless, cindery mass had been set forth Angus pronounced it perfect. Strange to say, it possessed a delectable something which he had never detected in porridge heretofore!

In truth, he vowed, he had never tasted anything to at all equal it!

This, Helen felt, her husband could affirm in all verity, and do his conscience no dishonor. Being of a practical turn of mind, however, she decided that possibly an addition of salt, and a lesser proportion of cinders, might not detract from its excellence.

A generous pitcher of Jersey cream, thick and golden, and a green glass bowl full of luscious, red strawberries had been sent in on the evening previous. These formed no mean part of the menu. It would not be advisable to let the imagination hover round the richness and flavor of these two special features. It might tend to fill the hungry soul with longing, for in their perfection they suggested the Promised Land!

Such a busy morning followed for the mistress of the manse.

Angus was called away immediately after breakfast, and Helen was left alone to set the new house in order as best she might, against the homecoming of her husband.

The dishes took an incredible time to wash up. When scraping the inevitable porridge pot, Helen decided that the adhesive mass cooked in it must have vulcanized its inner surface upon which she could make no impression.

Suddenly, a loud knock was heard at the front door. Through the uncurtained window Helen

espied a well-seasoned matron of mature appearance and comfortable proportions.

"Woe is me!" exclaimed the young bride in confusion, as she climbed over boxes and furniture to admit the early caller. It was not thus that she had pictured herself as receiving her husband's people. She was, alas, painfully aware that her arms were smudged and sooty from the rebellious kitchen stove, and that her morning dress had come into contact with some nails in the furniture packing. It would not have added to her serenity of mind had she realized that her hair was kinking in most unruly fashion from the steam of the kitchen teakettle. She suffered from a distinct and humbling realization that her appearance did not tend to establish confidence in the ministerial dignity of the pastor's wife.

What a veritable cornucopia of plenty met her eyes as she opened the door upon her visitor!

"Good morning, Ma'am! I hope I see you well?"

"Oh, very well indeed," answered Helen with a sweet, welcoming smile. "But won't you come in and lay down your parcels? It is such a very warm morning."

"I will indeed, Ma'am. I am 'most beat out," the newcomer gasped, as Helen led the way hospitably to the one easy chair. "I am Mrs. John Brownley; I was Amelia Smith before I was married on to John a matter of twenty years ago, more or less," she volunteered, as if the reflection were painful, as she leaned back in her chair with a sigh

that suggested earth tremors, and well-nigh wracked her bulk.

"Oh, indeed!" answered Helen, not at all clear in her mind whether she was supposed to condole or congratulate.

"I was just bringing in a few things for the minister," Mrs. Brownley continued, as she settled herself surrounded by her much goods—fanning herself meantime with a fan which Helen had produced, fearing lest a sudden fit of apoplexy might seize upon her guest.

"Why, Mrs. Brownley, how good of you to remember my husband."

"Don't speak of it ma'am. I just thought I would fetch over a few pork pies for him. If I do say it, there's no one can turn out a better pork pie than myself when I lay out to do it," she admitted with pardonable pride.

"I'm sure they look lovely, and it was most kind of you," said Helen, appreciatively, as she cleared a place for them upon the table.

"Not a bit of it, child! Our minister as is dead and gone; (took off sudden at last with a torment in his stomach and him only turning forty-five)—he ate them reg'lar every Monday morning. I fetched them with my own hands and sat there patient like until he finished them. I always hold ministers need heartenin' up of a Monday, and if there's anything can lift them up, sez I, it's my pork pies, as I made these from the pig I raised myself on left-overs, him showin' his bringin' up too, as well

he might, eatin' off my own table as you might say —it was to be expected as he should!"

"How kind you are, Mrs. Brownley, It was so thoughtful of you!" answered Helen, vainly endeavoring to smother the laughter which was threatening to undermine her ministerial dignity.

"Well, to be sure, child, *you* could not be expected to cook for the minister and you so young. If it had happened in the will of Providence as you'd got an *ordinary* man to set out meals for, it would be different. Just open that box, dear. There are a few jars of fruit as may come in handy when the church folk start droppin' in to meals."

"You really are so generous," gasped Helen, in fearful anticipation of such a contingency arising. She realized, to her everlasting undoing and confusion, her utter inability to cope with such a domestic situation.

"Do they come!—does it often happen, Mrs. Brownley?" enquired the mistress of the manse, timidly.

"Oh, well, off and on! Take the Biggses—there is Jonathan and Martha Ann, and Habakkuk and Hannah. They always laid off a market day and took dinner with the minister, it bein' a means of grace they always allowed and mighty upliftin'. Folks say as how old Jonathan laid a bag of turnips in the minister's cellar once of a Saturday. It went sore against his conscience, he allowed, to be settin' the minister's mind on perishin' things the day before the Sabbath."

"Are—are there many like that?" enquired Helen, fearfully, "that is, did the last minister's wife entertain much?"

"*Entertain!* Mrs. Fearman *entertain!* Not her, my dear! Poor Mrs. Fearman had no time to entertain! She let the folks entertain themselves while she was moilin' and stewin' in the summer kitchen till her face was fit to set fire to the tablecloth. Her four children were like as not wrastlin' with whoopin' cough and measles upstairs, and callin' their ma to fetch drinks, which it is well known to every ma as has raised children that the more drinks they get the more they want just to keep their mas a-goin', and what with her runnin' up to them, and cookin' for the hungry folks as had took a snack for early breakfast, layin' out to eat a good square meal at the minister's, poor Mrs. Fearman was fair beat out—she had no heart to entertain—hadn't Mrs. Fearman!"

"O Mrs. Brownley," gasped poor Helen, her heart sinking lower every moment. If Angus would only come! Angus would never permit such dire disaster to overtake her!

"Now, Mrs. MacDonald, I must be goin'. I'm leavin' you this quilt which I pieced myself, for your weddin' present. Every single bit of cloth in it belonged to some one in the congregation as has passed away, and is layin' out there in the churchyard. If I'd had the time, I could have worked on each piece the ailment that carried them off. It would have been real interestin' readin' for you

both, nights when you were lyin' wakeful. I thought it would be warm and comfortin' when the wind is screechin' and whinin' round the gravestones for the minister to know that his people was gone where they don't need no patched quilts to be keepin' them warm!"

Feeling that she could no longer bear up under the strain, poor Helen moved over to an open window, where, alas! the churchyard loomed up before her vision.

Extricating herself at last, with difficulty, from the cushioned armchair, Mrs. Brownley delivered herself of a passing discourse.

"Well, I must be gettin' home! You'll be wantin' to set out some victuals for your man. He looks done out at times and small wonder. It's wearin' on a minister, for sure, not knowin' who to take. Be thankful you've got him, Mrs. MacDonald, for there's others would have took him—bein' good cooks, too, and havin' boxes of quilts laid by in readiness. Amanda Softly, ownin' a Jersey cow as well, which would be pasturin' peacefully out there in the graveyard now if he'd took Amanda. Plenty of good milk is just what the minister needs to take that declinin' look off his face."

"O Mrs. Brownley," moaned Helen, in agony of spirit, "you don't think my husband looks sick, do you? Please! please! say you don't," pleaded the poor young bride, anguish depicted in every feature.

"Why, you dear child, don't take on! Your man will be all right. While there's life, there's hope, which is gospel truth—give him time! I'll see to it he gets them pork pies of a Monday morning, and you see to it he don't set up too late, nights. The neighbors do say as how they've seen his lamp burnin' as late as eleven o'clock of a night. It's the late hours ministers spend readin' and writin', when their eyes are fit to shut for want of rest, that makes their sermons drowsy of a Sunday morning and like to put us all over to sleep!"

Oh, blessed diversion! Blucher coming at nightfall to save the situation! Angus was coming to her relief at last!

Three steps and a jump brought him into the hall.

"Hello there, little wife! where are you?" and in his haste to discover her whereabouts he almost collided with the animated statue of plenty. "Why, good-morning Mrs. Brownley! I'm glad to see you," taking the kindly, ministering hand into his hearty grip, "you have been keeping my wife from being lonesome?"

"Yes, Mr. MacDonald, I have been settin' with your missis and givin' her a bit of advice. You can count on me for a friend of both of you. I like your woman already; she is not over strong looking and I'll see to it that she is not dragged out before her time like our last minister's wife was!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Brownley, I am sure we will both appreciate your friendship. Any kindness

shown to my wife is multiplied twice in my estimation."

"Well, I can promise you she will not be set upon like poor Mrs. Fearman was, as used to have all the greasy dishes left after the tea meeting, set in tubs for her to wash up. She did it faithful and no complainin' until the minister found it out and set tubs, dishes, pots, pans and all, right out on the church steps, it bein' of a Saturday night and the folks havin' to climb over them Sunday mornin' to get into the door!"

"Well, these are amazing revelations. What followed?" enquired Angus, his interest deeply roused.

"Ah, well! soon after that the minister was took, which was the quickest way out of his troubles, poor man! Poor Mrs. Fearman and her four children was left on the Widows' and Orphans' Fund. I heard they were hard pressed, Mrs. Fearman takin' in sewin' and doin' odds and ends to make a shift to keep the family beside her. She is poorly now, so I hear, and small wonder—as she was wore out, poor thing, before her husband was took."

She had reached the door, talking as she gravitated towards it, and at last, with a warning word to Mrs. MacDonald to look well after the wants of the minister and not to neglect his victuals, she took her long-delayed departure.

Poor Helen! alas for her praiseworthy ambition to be the bright, cheerful wife, waiting to welcome

her husband to his first dinner in their new home! It was a very disheartened and fearful wife who clung to her husband for comfort and reassurance.

"O, Angus!" she cried, "you could never imagine the awful things she said! You are perfectly well, aren't you, Angus?—you are not hiding anything from me—you don't imagine you might be in a decline, do you, Angus?—please tell me!" she pleaded.

This was too much for Angus, whose Herculean feats had ever been the envy of his college friends. Taking her face in his hands, the better to scan its lines, the whole manse rang with his laughter.

"Decline? Let us go to the dining room, my precious wife, and I will furnish all proofs that at present I am not too far reduced to sit up to the table without support. I say nothing about what assistance I may require when I have finished. Blessings on the head of the devoted Mrs. Brownley! May her tongue be loosened to greater eloquence! Long may she live to produce pork pies!

"Don't you worry, Helen," he said, placing his protecting arm around her, "nothing can hurt you; no one is going to impose on my little wife! They are at heart a kind and generous people; poor Mrs. Brownley was ill-advised, perhaps, in her choice of a topic, and inclined to be reminiscent, but she is the salt of the earth, notwithstanding—savor and all!"

Chapter V

SOUL-SEARCHING EXPERIENCES

"Something too much of this."

IT was the Sabbath day and Helen MacDonald was to make her first appearance in Bloomfield Church as the minister's wife.

The air of the sweet, June morning was fragrant with the perfume of clover. The tall, graceful elms at either side of the manse gateway stretched heavenward their arms in praise and adoration to the God of all nature.

The little song birds trilled their tenderest melodies over the way in the white-tombstone-dotted graveyard snuggled peacefully away under the very eaves of the sanctuary.

The sweetest lullabies were crooned over the little, crumbling stone, erected, now eighty years gone by, to the memory of Jamie, aged two. Some mother's heart, long crumbled to dust, refused to be comforted when the little form was laid away. But the music of heaven ceased not, and the ears that were unopened to earth's discords had long revelled in the celestial harmonies, and the little feet, lifted so early from life's toilsome road were spared many a weary mile where, God knows, they might have been torn and bruised by many a wayside bramble.

On that bright morning, many a kindly glance was cast towards the manse pew, where the Rev. Angus MacDonald had proudly led his young wife.

How pretty she looked that day! Her sheer, white dress and large hat encircled with corn-flowers, the color of her eyes, became her well, as did the heightened color due to the trying experience of being the centre of observation.

The manse pew boasted a proud position towards the front of the wing. Wings, as all will admit, have a way of growing on churches. Doubtless, their mission is symbolical, and in that sense they furnish a fitting addition to a sanctuary, but unfortunately they have a fatal tendency to throw the modest and retiring occupants of the front pews into the limelight.

Helen eventually gained courage to lift her eyes, and to her surprise and utter undoing was confronted by the same huge and unmistakable black and white checks which had arrested her wondering gaze on the evening of her arrival.

Donald McClintock, brave in his suit of startling design, occupied the seat immediately in front of Helen. The checks stood out in bold relief, and try as she might to concentrate upon the service they intruded themselves constantly. To her horror and confusion, she discovered herself unconsciously arranging the checkers—kings and men—in the most advantageous position to win out, upon the wide shoulder expanses of Donald McClintock, elder and manager.

She afterwards learned that these checks had long taken their unquestioned place in the sanctuary, and ever lent a fitting solemnity to funerals by their chaste and sober coloring. At weddings they likewise assisted by their cheerful design and fearless outline.

A strange minister was occupying the pulpit in Bloomfield Church and sharing the service with the pastor on this occasion, which was destined to be a memorable one for the minister's bride.

The old twenty-third Psalm was lined. Helen joined in with true and heartfelt worship.

> Goodness and mercy all my life,
> Shall surely follow me,
> And in God's house for evermore
> My dwelling place shall be. AMEN.

Angus MacDonald took the Book and read the one hundred and third Psalm.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:"

She *did* bless the Lord with all her heart and soul, but what should she ever hope to render Him for all His benefits?

She would try, oh so hard, to help her husband, she decided with a quick glance at Angus. By the way, how handsome he looked in the gown, and bands, and how the visiting minister fell short by comparison.

Shocked to find her thoughts straying into the paths of worldliness and vanity, she fixed her eyes once more on the open page in front of her.

All went well until the Rev. John Worthington was half-way through the prayer. Suddenly, and without any introductory form of approach his voice was raised in an agony of petition. He wrestled in his intensity as did Jacob of old, and to Helen's amazement and utter confusion she realized that she, herself, was the humble member of the congregation who had called forth this unwonted burst of supplication:

"May the minister's wife be a helpmeet indeed that maketh not ashamed:

"May she uphold the hands of the minister and confirm his feeble knees:

"May she abound richly in every Christian grace and virtue, forgetting the things of this world and pressing forward to the things which are before:

"May she eschew vanity and remain untouched by the things of this perishing world:

"May she ever sit in subjection at her husband's feet, acknowledging herself to be indeed the weaker vessel:

"May her feet be quick to run on errands of mercy, and her hands ever ready to lift the burden:

"May no member of this congregation ever appeal to her in vain for help or succor, and vouchsafe unto thine handmaiden, we pray, strength for the burdens which must inevitably fall to her lot as a minister's helpmeet:

"May she ever help to build her husband up in his most holy faith, not forgetting to look well to the ways of her own household, even as that perfect woman, set forth by Solomon, whose husband was known in the gates!"

"*Amen,*" responded some voice from the back of the church.

"*Amen! so let it be!*"

Poor Helen's face burned with confusion at being so singled out publicly; her eyes smarted with unshed tears when she raised her head at the close of the long-drawn-out avalanche of petition.

"What right had he! How dare he!" she asked herself over and over again. Angus, casting an anxious glance in the direction of the manse pew detected a sparkle in his wife's eye, which he realized was not called forth by any humbled condition of mind, due to the Rev. John Worthington's exhortation on her behalf.

Helen was naturally the most amiable and sweet-dispositioned girl in the world, but generations of Irish ancestors doubtless accounted for the unbecoming and combative frame of mind in which she found herself.

At the close of the service Donald McClintock turned on her the whole glory of his dazzling array and took her hand in his great, hearty grip.

Immediately Helen's heart warmed towards checks, as a most becoming and seemly garb for an elder.

Many others followed his kindly example. Her

husband's people were evidently prepared to accept her as she was, doubtless hoping for a growth of grace. The minister's young wife was filled with conflicting emotions. She wanted above all things to be a helpmeet—well then, why resent being prayed for? she argued to herself.

Angus judiciously talked to his parishioners a while at the close of the service and strolled out to give his horse a drink before entering into his wife's presence.

"What right had he to do it, Angus? How dare he make me so conspicuous before the whole congregation?" Helen demanded, an unwonted sparkle in her eye.

"Helen, dear, you don't understand. He did not mean anything but kindness to my wife in praying as he did; to be sure, he might have cut out—"

"Kindness! Kindness!" she interrupted, "to bare my naked soul to the gaze of the whole congregation!"

"They could see nothing but goodness and purity there, my precious wife," responded Angus, his heart overflowing with love and sympathy for his little, wounded helpmeet.

"It isn't that at all, Angus; it is not that I don't require to be prayed for—Goodness knows no one realizes that more than I do myself—but, don't you see—I could never be the kind of person he wanted me to be in his prayer—not if he prayed himself speechless, and the people will be so disappointed,

and that will make it harder for you and may spoil your work."

Here, Helen's composure gave way and Angus drew the sensitive, quivering, little form close to his side while he assured her—beyond all gainsaying—that such a combination of virtues as set forth by the visiting minister might prove rather wearing upon a man whose feet were of mere clay. Besides, he concluded, *he* was well satisfied with his wife's present graces and virtues.

Strange to say, this weak and irrelevant treatment of the subject did more to restore Helen's confidence in her ability to *carry on* as the minister's wife than did the many petitions poured out for her by the over-solicitous John Worthington.

One more chastening experience awaited Helen during the week which followed.

The congregation of Bloomfield was honored in having as one of its members a woman who possessed an inexhaustible fund of information upon all subjects pertaining to church management in its broadest sense. Her wide grasp of a subject, added to her profound knowledge of ecclesiastical law, would have put many a church lawyer to outward confusion.

It was the closing hour of the Women's Missionary Meeting.

On account of its being Helen's first appearance, she had been asked to prepare a paper and had done so to the best of her no mean ability. She was inwardly congratulating herself upon the fact that

her discourse upon Confucianism and Buddhism had been well received and would, doubtless, prove both enlightening and uplifting, when her pleasant self-complacency received a rude shock.

"Perhaps our minister's wife will explain to us what she considers to be a just and proper working basis on which to establish Church Union when the fathers and brethren undertake to give it their profound consideration," suggested Mrs. Wiseman of the enquiring mind, reaching forth for knowledge and teaching.

An appalling hush ensued.

"Woe is me, I am undone!" was Helen's voiceless, agonizing cry.

How little did Mrs. Wiseman know with what anguish the heart of their minister's wife was wrung as she and the other members of the society sat expectantly awaiting her illuminating reply.

"'Church Union'?" did she say . . "Church Union?" . . "*What is Church Union*, and on what basis?"—Oh, yes! She knew all about it, of course she did. Certain doctrines and Church legislation agreeable to the different denominations would constitute the basis—oh! if she could only say it.

Unbroken silence reigned.

A cricket under the box stove lifted up its brazen voice and rejoiced openly at her confusion. Through the open window overlooking the graveyard, her eye espied an inscription to the beloved memory of one Anne Plunket.

"'At Rest'!—what a blessed and enviable lot was hers! Would she were even as Anne! Oh, she *must* say something—if Angus were only here!" she agonized.

Why did Mrs. Jones persist in wearing those grotesque, purple bonnet strings? Why!

Finally, choking with nervousness and embarrassment, she gasped out,

"Oh, dear Mrs. Wiseman—I don't know—that is, I—I seem to be nervous—I am so sorry! I do hope you won't mind!—Won't you please explain it for me? I should be so glad," pleaded Helen.

Great was the poor, young wife's inward confusion. She felt that she had failed, dismally and to her everlasting undoing. She realized that her treatment of the subject and her attitude towards it had not tended to establish confidence in her ability to grasp a subject. She would have to tell Angus, who had enough burdens to bear, and she was proving but an added one.

Imagine her surprise and relief when dear old Mrs. Jones of the purple bonnet strings came valiantly to her rescue.

"Don't be worritin' the poor child about Church Union and the like! Sure, she has plenty to worry about just now, and her just married ontil the minister! She can't be knowing everything yet, and her with us but a matter of a few days!" and she laid her toil-worn hand protectingly on the young wife's shoulder.

Helen could literally have fallen upon her neck

in the outpouring of her gratitude, and embraced her, purple bonnet strings and all. How could she ever have considered them disfiguring? Dear old Mrs. Jones was not dependent upon any such outward adornment to enhance her beauty. Her loving consideration and goodness of heart transfigured her with a beauty not of this world—a beauty not based on any foundation so fleeting and perishable as mere bonnet strings!

When Helen related the harrowing experience to her husband as they sat over their evening meal, he seemed highly entertained. The tragedy of the situation did not seem to impress him, for as he helped himself to another generous slice of toast he enquired of her why she did not answer. Although she could not speak on general terms regarding Church Union, she could particularize.

She had a personal knowledge, for instance, of one case where the union of different denominations was working out amazingly well.

"Take my own case as an example," he argued. "As you know, my wife was a Methodist before marriage, and now—she's steeped in Calvinism," he asserted, with a faith and confidence nothing short of sublime.

Chapter VI

COMPANY FOR TEA

"You may live without poetry, music or art,
You may live without conscience, you may live without heart,
You may live without friends, you may live without books,
But civilized man cannot live without cooks."

THE first few weeks in the new home were filled with domestic responsibility for the minister's bride; setting in order their "*Lares and Penates*," and unpacking the precious wedding gifts. These latter included seven clocks of different designs, each calculated to teach the minister the habit of punctuality but failing to agree among themselves, as is so often the attitude of over-zealous reformers.

These were a few of the all-absorbing activities, nor must it be forgotten that the silver ice-pitcher of colossal proportions, and the generous sized pudding dish received their respective places of honor upon the sideboard.

Alas! that the years should discover their glory departed—but not their usefulness. An ice-pitcher and pudding dish have ever proven ready receptacles for odds and ends—from grandfather's

glasses down to his tiny grandson's miniature bootees!

Ere long, the wide, hospitable rooms of the old manse took on a distinctly homey and inviting appearance. Helen's carefully selected pictures, music-strewn piano and well-lined bookshelves within easy reach of the cushion-heaped couch, bore testimony to the artistic taste and personality of the mistress of the house.

The young bride's efforts in the cooking line had for the greater part proven outstandingly successful—or so her husband's enthusiasm would have led you to believe. To be sure, there were times when misfortune was her lot and her cake refused to rise to the occasion. This was discouraging in the extreme considering the fact that she had weighed the ingredients to an atom, and compounded the whole with the precision of a druggist's apprentice.

Opening the oven door at the precise fraction of a second specified in "Handy Hints," imagine her dismay when a poor, dismal, depressed mass would meet her astonished gaze. What a sad combination of complete collapse and abnormal bumpiness the poor cake was wont to present!

But the clue was at hand—she had overlooked the postscript, the closing paragraph, which stated that after having carefully followed all directions, "everything depended upon atmospheric conditions and the state of the oven . . . !"

What a generous people the Bloomfield folk were

to be sure. One hundred jars of fruit filled the manse shelves ere long. To appear at the manse empty handed, was akin to going to church minus collection. A worthy custom it was, and an example deserving of emulation; but, sad to relate, one which has long since fallen into disuse, until it is now as extinct as the eleven cent breakfast bacon, the two-for-a-quarter chickens, and other such desirable products as abounded in that delectable land in those far-off, fat years.

The marvel lies in the fact that any one living in those days survived to tell the tale; that one and all did not succumb to the horrible fate so feelingly described in the words, "digging their own graves with their teeth."

Small likelihood of any such dismal fate befalling us of the present-day lean and ill-favored years!

Encouraged and emboldened by her growing success in the art domestic, Helen conceived the brilliant idea of inviting the representative elder to tea, and after much serious consideration and many references to "Handy Hints," she decided to serve high tea, or, as Mrs. Wise designated it, with all the charm which mystery adds, "a *recherche* tea."

Helen could see that her husband was much agitated in mind upon hearing of her decision. He was a strong believer in what might be described as a vulgar display of cookery, or, in other words, a well spread table.

Out of concession to the minister's idea of what

was fitting food to lay before the chief elder, his wife decided to add to the menu, puff biscuits, in the making of which she excelled and, figuratively speaking, felt the ground firm beneath her feet when she undertook their manufacture.

At six o'clock sharp, Mr. Douglas arrived and domestic affairs came to a crisis, as all housekeepers will agree they have a way of doing at the last, crucial moment.

The fire refused to do its bit, and the dustpan was called into requisition as the stove suffered from an acute and spasmodic form of non-circulation which incapacitated it at times. Unfortunately, this was one of the occasions!

Great confusion followed the revelation that Thomas, the cat, who had heretofore borne an unbesmirched reputation, had suddenly fallen from his high estate and partaken freely of the cream which was intended for tea. To this was added the discovery that a cherished pink rosebud pitcher had in some unaccountable manner suffered dislocation of the neck. Helen, her attention momentarily diverted, forgot the biscuits! Imagine her relief and delight upon opening the oven door, to behold the lofty and dizzy heights to which they had ascended!

Angus would not be covered with confusion in the presence of his elder by being forced to offer him "*unleavened bread*"!

"Aren't they wonderful?" enquired the proud, flushed little bride. "You think I *will* learn, don't you Angus? I don't believe Amanda Softly,

whoever she is, could make any lighter biscuits than these anyway! To be sure, *my* personal possessions did not include a cow. Do you know, Angus, I am *jealous*, yes *positively jealous*—of that wretched cow!" and her tiny, slippered foot went down with decision.

"Helen, you are the most ridiculous small person that I ever knew," laughed her husband, and the biscuits cooled perceptibly while he again assured his wife that a whole herd of cows plus any other girl, would have made no impression on his Scottish, adamantine heart.

The proud moment came at last when Angus plied his elder with the "*piece de resistance.*" He did not reach the biscuit stage himself until after he had coerced his long-suffering guest into partaking of two of the proud erections. He helped himself to one with great satisfaction—stopping to gaze a moment upon its noble and well-developed proportions before, as it were, taking his final leap. Taking a generous bite, the fashion of his countenance was changed! He cast a look of consternation and compassion upon his victimized elder, who, having nothing else provided, was heroically endeavoring to dispose of his second biscuit.

Horrible revelations followed! An overdose of potash—a simple case of mistaken identity as personified by the soda and baking powder cans respectively, two heaping spoonfuls of soda being responsible for their rise, and alas! also for their fall!

The same boldness of attack, perseverance and

fortitude which enabled the unconquered Scot to come off victorious on the historic field of Bannockburn, has since stood the elder in good stead, and while the minister and his wife would hardly dare suggest that the biscuits provided the impetus, yet truth compels them to admit that since he ate of those biscuits, he has steadily advanced to prosperity; the leaven that he received at the manse doubtless proving a strong factor in his rise.

One more experience through which Helen was called to pass in those first days enlarged her vision mightily and provided for her the right perspective in matters domestic.

It was a Friday evening. The minister had been at the beck and call of the congregation all the week and he and his wife had looked forward to a cosy evening together with their favorite books and music.

Helen had been under a musical influence all day and had reached the stage when it must needs find expression. Angus stretched himself wearily on the great couch with eyes closed as Helen sang several of her best selections. Finishing an aria in which high B flat figured prominently, attacking it with clearness and precision and holding it with ease for the allotted time, she closed her music and involuntarily turned to her husband for a measure of appreciation and applause.

How cruelly was she awakened from her dream when instead of discovering him spellbound and speechless, she was brought violently to earth by

hearing him enquire feelingly if there happened to be any *pie* in the pantry!

Poor Angus, seeing by his wife's face that he had in some blundering way offended, and trying to smooth matters over and make amends, rushed madly to his destruction.

"That was great, Helen. I always said you could put them all in the shade with your singing," he ventured in a pacifying tone.

"Angus MacDonald!" exclaimed Helen, getting up from the piano stool and facing him, "I don't believe you heard one note of it—not one! You are forever thinking of what you can or cannot get to eat! A man of your education and culture should have a soul above that kind of thing. To you, that whole, magnificent, soul-stirring aria sounded out one note and one only, and that note was pie—*pie—pie*! I am sick to death of *Pies*! They're a miserable, indigestible mass and I wish the man who invented them—for of course it *was* a man—had died of acute indigestion at the first bite!—Yes I do!"

Angus was consideration itself for having wounded his wife's feelings. He realized that he had not chosen the psychological moment to make his request. Helen noted, however, that, due doubtless to his Celtic origin, having taken a strong position on the pie question, as on any other question involving great issues, he stood firm and retreated not an inch. Neither did he in a weak and spine-

less effort to restore peace, offer to eschew pie in the future.

The domestic sky was again clear and serene next morning when Helen stole quietly downstairs and welded together two raspberry pies. These she bore to her husband as a peace offering and had to confess that they produced a seraphic expression upon his countenance which all her rhapsodies and arias had failed to call forth.

"Poor boy! he was hungry—just plain hungry—"

The primitive man reaching forth for his food had asserted himself.

Jellies, salads and angel cake had failed to provide a tired man, suffering from the effects of physical and mental fag, with the nourishment he needed.

Helen philosophized as she washed the breakfast dishes, cleaned the lamps and prepared the vegetables for dinner. She had decided to have new potatoes, green peas, lamb chops and the prepossessing pies. Harmony she must have at any cost, and if harmony could best be produced by performing upon the pots and pans, she would forthwith begin to practise diligently upon them.

Great was her reward as she observed how her husband's countenance literally shone when, at the noon hour, she set forth the results of her labors. She realized, with much inward confusion, that her big, six-foot Highlander had been dying by inches of slow starvation,—within sight of the Promised Land.

Chapter VII

CALLERS AT THE MANSE

"Patient—though sorely tried."

IT was hot—unspeakably hot—a day which was wont to discover the weak points in one's spiritual and physical armor.

The long stretch of sandy road which fronted the manse lawn seemed to draw the rays of sun and hold them fast in its heated grip. The leaves of the maples hung lifeless and depressed, and the dispirited cows wandered aimlessly round the pasture field with a dejected air, in search of a cool, shaded retreat, and perchance a little water wherewith they might slake their noonday thirst.

The manse boasted a garden which bore all manner of fruit and wherein the berries were ever hanging ready to be gathered, or so at least it seemed to Helen, who decided that as her husband was away, she would show her housewifely instinct by picking some of them herself.

Barely had she donned her big garden hat with the becoming blue ribbons, when she espied coming up the walk Miss Peace Perkins, a member of Angus' congregation who was noted for her serenity, her poise of character, her utter indifference

to discomfort, and her composure under all circumstances.

Helen made a hasty retreat from the berry bush, conscious that her morning dress was not one that she would have selected in which to entertain afternoon guests. But then, when did guest ever before arrive at such an unseemly hour as half-past one o'clock?

As she opened the door to her untimely visitor it seemed as though a cool breeze were wafted through the maples. A sense of peace and well-being stole over her as Peace Perkins entered the manse.

Cool and self-possessed, the guest seated herself on the one stiff, high-backed chair which the room boasted, and beyond answering in monosyllables she volunteered no remark, nor did she enlarge upon any subject which the minister's wife could introduce.

"What very warm weather we are having, Miss Perkins," ventured Helen, doubting not that on this one subject they would be sure to discover mutual ground.

"Do you think so?" enquired the placid guest.

"Oh, I find it very warm. Do you always have summers as warm as this one, Miss Perkins?"

"Off and on," responded Miss Perkins, evasively.

"I—I find it rather enervating, but probably I shall get used to it."

"Folks do," affirmed her visitor, with unruffled composure.

"I do hope I didn't keep you waiting long. I was in the garden," explained Helen. "The berries ripen so rapidly. I was picking a few."

"No!"

An appalling silence enveloped them. Helen cast desperately round in her mind for some new subject which could not be so readily disposed of.

"I have been doing up fruit, and as it is my first experience I was rather nervous," she essayed.

"Yes."

No further comment!

"Perhaps you would tell me how you do yours," suggested Helen, with renewed hope, persuaded that at long last she had hit on a subject which would necessitate elaboration.

"Just boil with sugar and seal over."

"That sounds very simple. Does that answer for every kind of fruit?" queried Helen, amazed at the brevity of the directions.

"Yes," Miss Perkins responded conclusively.

In vain did Helen endeavor to maintain a flow of conversation. Subject after subject was introduced and disposed of forthwith.

The long, summer afternoon drowsed away its interminable length. The curtains, unswayed by any vagrant breeze, hung limp and lifeless. A drowsy bumble bee chanted its endless bass on one long, sustained note. A white cat with noiseless, cushioned feet, padded her silent way across the lawn and stretched herself in luxurious ease in the shade of the lilac trees.

The seven clocks struck the hours—two, three, four—at seven different intervals, but still the silent guest sat apparently lost in reverie, speechless and immovable. Just as Helen decided that she would certainly scream aloud if the tension were not soon removed, Peace Perkins rose, and "folding her tents like the Arabs, she silently stole away," with naught but a slight pressure of the hand for farewell.

Absolutely exhausted, the minister's young wife threw herself down upon the couch to rest, only to be disturbed by a shuffling of feet and a loud ring at the door bell.

"Is the minister at home, ma'am?" enquired a tall, muscular, able-bodied young giant, in a stentorian tone.

"No. I am very sorry, he had to drive over to Beresford, but he will probably be home in about an hour. Won't you come in—Mr. Busby, it is, I believe? I think I met you at the reception, didn't I?"

"Right you are ma'am," shaking Helen's extended hand vigorously. "Thanks, I will step in a minute," and mopping his cheerful, ruddy countenance, he carefully picked his way over the rugs to a seat.

"Would there be anything I could do for you, Mr. Busby?" enquired Helen, considerately. "It is disappointing to come so far on a hot day and not see Mr. MacDonald."

"Well, ma'am," he stammered after some

hesitation," you see, I don't just know how you could help. I don't for sure," he added, twisting his hat nervously.

Helen sat and quietly awaited revelations.

"Oh well! I suppose I may as well make a clean breast of it. The truth is, I want to get married—that is, Eliza Ann does—and I wanted the minister to do the job. So now you know the worst," and having made clear his intention in no uncertain tone, he settled back in the chair which creaked to its doom under the heavy weight of young manhood.

"Well, I am sure Mr. MacDonald will be glad to marry you, Mr. Busby. Perhaps I could arrange a date that would suit my husband," suggested Helen, resourcefully.

"Why, sure enough now, ma'am, perhaps you could," the prospective bridegroom answered, much relieved. "Women are great on arranging marriages, anyway, it being more in their line, so why not, to be sure?

"I may just as well out with the whole thing, Mrs. MacDonald," he volunteered confidentially, hitching his chair nearer to hers and throwing reticence to the winds.

"You see, it's just like this. The girl I've been keeping steady company with lives fully a matter of ten miles from my place as the crow flies, and I've been going to see her constant—summer and winter, winter and summer—for a matter of seven years or more. Week in and week out I've gone, in all kinds of dirty weather, and over all kinds

of heavy roads. I'm making no kind of complaint for myself whatever, although you'll admit, ma'am, that *it is hard; on both man and beast!* So I just decided, since it had to be sometime, it might better be over with before the rainy weather sets in, and the roads get all cut up and pitchy.

" 'A merciful man is merciful to his beast,' so I've heard said, and it sounds to me like good horse sense. Not that I mean any harm, ma'am, by seeming to make a joke in the minister's house."

At this stage Helen laughed outright, joined by her cheery visitor, and her husband entering, wondered what had called forth such unwonted hilarity.

Offering no explanation his wife made a hasty exit, leaving the would-be bridegroom to the tender ministrations of the minister.

Chapter VIII

A MEETING OF SESSION

"True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home."

THE minister of Bloomfield preached to his people the gospel of love—but of love in action.

When he prayed, "Thy Kingdom come—on earth" he had a vision of a community wherein the love of God was made manifest through the spirit of Christ wrought out in the social and religious life of the people.

He believed that the Church should mould the thought and influence the business and recreation of the world, and that men love and serve their God in proportion to the degree in which they love and serve their fellow men.

As he preached this gospel, it can readily be imagined that there would be those among his hearers who would not see eye to eye with him. Conspicuous among these figured Simon Snedbeck. Rooted and grounded in his convictions and prejudices, Simon was not of the stuff of which social reformers are made. Greatly did Angus MacDonald marvel how any one man could be so thoroughly upright and unimpeachable in character, and at the same time prove so hair-splitting and gnat-straining.

Strange, the small issues which can be enlarged by the church militant to such overwhelming proportions as to well-nigh wreck a congregation—not because of the significance of the issue, nor yet because the faith of the fathers has been assailed and is in danger of tottering to its doom.

Far from it!

Not from these sources is the church "with schisms rent asunder."

A meeting of session had been called to deal with some important issues, and the appointed hour found every man in his place. The minister presided, and at the conclusion of the opening exercises the order of business was called for. The first few items were dealt with, involving little or no discussion, but the next in order was one regarding a wreath which it was suggested should be sent by the session of the church to be placed upon the coffin of their late pastor's wife, who had that day departed to her long home.

Mr. Saulter, a good, upright man who did his duty faithfully as it was revealed unto him, and who held the respect of the whole community, made a motion to the effect that a wreath be sent to the memory of the late Mrs. Fearman from the session of the church to which her husband had given the best years of a devoted, Christian ministry.

A silence ensued, broken by Simon Snedbeck. "A wreath, did you say?" enquired he, holding his hand to his ear. "I don't believe in wreaths."

"State your objections, Simon," requested the generous and sympathetic Mr. Saulter.

"Well, I don't stand for encouraging extravagance in this session, and some of the rest of you would be the better of keeping a closer eye on the church funds, to my way of thinking. Wreaths mean money!"

"It seems to me," objected Mr. Saulter, "that it is hardly in good taste to discuss a question of this kind. I hesitate . . . "

"And where is the bad taste in it, I'd like to know? No question was ever made that a session has not a perfect right to discuss if it wants to—taste or no taste, I say, business is business! and I, for one, object to laying out good money on wreaths. I don't want a lot of money laid out on no wreath for me."

"Don't mention it, Simon! We would expend the amount with pleasure—any time at all—consider it is yours!"

"Hear! Hear!" from the other members of the session greeted Dr. Rolston's generous offer.

"Well, you don't need to, Doctor," reiterated Simon, rising heavily to his feet. "I move an amendment—that we don't send the wreath. It isn't the money altogether, neither."

At this juncture, the minister rose.

"Might we, as a session, hear your conscientious objections to sending the wreath, Mr. Snedbeck? I understand your former minister's wife was dearly beloved in the congregation."

"Oh, Mrs. Fearman was well spoken of, and kindly, too. She was good to my missis and the children when they were all took down with typhoid at once, she set up whole nights tending them, and the doctor allowed it was the nursing saved Jimmy. I have nothing against Mrs. Fearman—nothing whatever—it's a matter of principle," he answered, finality in his tone.

"I fail to see any principle involved. Perhaps you can further enlighten us, Mr. Snedbeck," suggested the minister, seating himself until such time as his elder be delivered of his conscientious scruples.

"Well, you see," continued Mr. Snedbeck, again rising to his feet, "it is the *precedent*—the *precedent*. It's a serious thing, this establishing a *precedent*. We send a wreath to one minister's wife to-day, who knows how soon we may be called upon to repeat. . . . ."

Like a flash the minister jumped to his feet. Could it be possible that this warlike, towering son of Scotia could be their peace-loving, kindly-spoken pastor?

"Sit down! Sit down!" demanded he, in no uncertain tone. "The Lord forbid that you should ever have another opportunity to discuss a like subject in this session."

Then turning to the other,

"Mr. Saulter, did I understand you to have made a motion to send the wreath?"

"I did, Mr. Moderator."

Dr. Rolston rose to second the motion and strange to say, every hand went up when the vote was taken, not excepting that of Simon Snedbeck himself, who had no idea of having violated any unwritten law of sentiment. As he afterwards explained, he did not know the minister was so in favor of *wreaths* when he spoke his mind which he felt it was his duty to do, as *precedents* were serious things to creep into sessions!

This question being disposed of, Dr. Rolston rose to his feet.

"Mr. Moderator and members of session. There is a little matter which I should like to bring before you to night. It is one in which our minister is deeply interested and I think we, as a session, should be equally so."

Involuntarily, the doctor hesitated and drew himself up to his full height before exploding his bomb.

"I, for one, would be glad to know of some way in which we could be of more assistance to the minister and the church at large," said Mr. Saulter, his interest already awakened.

"Well, Mr. MacDonald could make it much clearer that I can but I will do my best. The truth is, I would like to see our church branch out—in others words, widen its activities.

"Why can't we, here in Bloomfield, get busy and introduce improved social conditions. If you want a child to grow up spiritually and mentally fit, he must be physically fit! I firmly believe that every

man's child is entitled to the best the Church and State can provide."

"Hear! Hear!" interrupted Mr. Saulter, whose privilege and responsibility it was to educate the children of Bloomfield.

"What about medical and dental examination in the schools? There is many a social outcast and inmate of our gaols whose downfall is due to abnormal physical conditions. Had they received treatment in their early years, they could to-day have been respectable members of society.

"Mr. Saulter, you have had a long experience with children, can you bear me out in this?"

Mr. Saulter lost no time in rising

"I agree with every word the doctor has said. I know of a case in point where a child of twelve years of age could not learn to read. He invariably made mistakes in copying his work from the blackboard, and was pronounced dull, incapable and careless. A medical examination revealed the fact that the child was short-sighted. He received treatment, and this year passed for senior matriculation.

"May I take up a few minutes more of the session's time, Mr. Moderator? I feel sure I can speak for Dr. Rolston, we are deeply interested in your plans."

"My plans are pretty much those already adopted by the Rev. John Matheson of Beresford," explained the moderator.

"Oh, so that's the way the wind blows," inter-

rupted the opinionated Simon. "Why they say he spends the church's good money on things that have nothing to do with religion—such as hockey, baseball and story books, which to my way of thinking encourage idleness and shiftlessness. If you want the body built up, let the young folks, yes, and the older folks too, get down to good hard work. When they've wrought from sunrise to sunset, they won't feel much like chasing round after a ball, come evening I'm thinking—and no book will keep their eyes open at nights for long, I'll warrant. If I'm not mistaken, my old friend here, Duncan McCallum will bear me out in this."

All eyes were turned with expectancy to Duncan, who slowly rose to his feet. He was a man of few words. Since the early death of his wife he had lived much to himself, and what hours he could spare from toil were devoted to reading. He was well informed regarding all the leading issues of the day.

As he stood before them, his eyes seemed fixed on futurity.

"Mr. Moderator, and members of the session. My old friend has misjudged me if he thinks I agree with the position he has taken. I have lived a long time and have seen many changes. It is my belief that methods which served the purpose yesterday, may not necessarily be effective to-day. In my young manhood, we reaped our grain with a sickle. That slow, single-handed process would not begin to answer to-day. On account of the long hours of toil that this necessitated, there was little time

for reading or recreation, and few newspapers or books to read had there been the leisure.

"To-day, social conditions are entirely different. We must move with the times.

"In the early days, the church was the great power for social and spiritual uplift, but I believe the time has come when she, too, must widen her borders and be prepared to adopt new methods in order to build up the whole body and the community in Christ Jesus."

Duncan McCallum took his seat, and a reverent hush ensued, to be broken by Simon.

"You are getting your brain softened, man! You've been sitting at your books too long, I always knew it would come to this!"

"Thank you, Mr. McCallum," interrupted the doctor, "your broad and sympathetic interest means more to me than you can realize. You see, I believe that the soul and body are closely allied, and when you build up the body, the soul is nourished and strengthened. You cannot separate them."

"No one can do that but the doctor himself," put in James Shelton, a member of session who possessed an untimely sense of humor.

"Well, perhaps so!" laughed the doctor with ready good-nature, "but you can help to defeat my ends if you will agree to improve social conditions."

The minister rose in his place.

"I think it is unnecessary for me to state before you to-night my position regarding the subject

we have been considering. You know that I endeavor as best I can to preach a practical religion, in which both faith and works play their respective parts. Are you prepared to make a motion to-night touching the question under discussion?"

"Not to-night, Mr. MacDonald," answered the doctor. "What I desire is, that every man here will well weigh this issue that I have endeavored to present. My hope is, that as a session and a church, we will soon be prepared to widen our borders and stake our lines farther out as regards service to the community at large."

At the close of the meeting the members and the minister shook hands warmly with the doctor.

"You are along the right lines, Doctor, "said Angus, "I think we can work out new ideas by degrees, it will take time and patience, though. Come over to the manse some night soon and we will talk it over. You know there is always a warm welcome for you," urged his friend hospitably.

"I know it and appreciate it, Mr. MacDonald—but, forgive my weakness, I will be stronger later on."

"Oh, come Doctor, cheer up! This will never do! I have a feeling that all will come right, yet."

As Angus walked home through the darkness he recalled the story which the other had confided to him and which was known by himself only.

On a cold, wet night in early November, nearly two years gone by, when the leaves lay soaked and sodden on the ground and the dark sky low-

ered down upon the despondent earth, Dr. Rolston had been called to visit a woman who, accompanied by her daughter, was staying for a few weeks at a large summer home bordering on the lake. Mrs. Grayson was reported to be very wealthy—everything seemed to point towards it, and had been in the neighborhood but a few days when the doctor was hastily summoned to her bedside. He did what he could to relieve her suffering but realized that it was only temporary assistance which he could render as her face was already turned towards the far country. During the month in which the doctor attended his patient, he learned to look forward to his daily meeting with Bessie Grayson.

Her loving solicitude for her mother and her sweet self-effacement were beautiful to behold.

An occasional walk by the lake-shore and drive through the country established a strong friendship, yes, more than a friendship on the doctor's side as he too well knew—but alas! he was only a young, struggling, country doctor, and the Graysons were hopelessly rich! How dare he presume to offer his love to Bessie Grayson—he, with nothing to offer but his love!

How could he suggest that Bessie Grayson, possessed as she was of beauty, position and wealth, be the wife of a country doctor of very limited means? How could he have the temerity to propose such a thing?

Oh, yes, He loved her! He had loved her from the first night he had seen her at her mother's bed-

side, her dark eyes shining like stars, her pretty little head banded round with braids of shining black hair and her dark beauty enhanced by the sheer white of her filmy dress.

How grateful he had been that night for the professional knowledge which had enabled him to relieve her mother's suffering, and to drive away the dumb, agonized expression from the eyes of the devoted daughter.

If he could have persuaded himself that it was honorable on his part, he would so gladly have told her of his love! But pride sealed his lips, and the last day arrived when Bessie Grayson and her mother were to leave for their home in an adjoining city.

As the doctor held Bessie's hand in farewell, he gazed long and earnestly into her eyes as if he would fain read the very secrets of her soul, but he found no answer to his unspoken question. Bessie seized the opportunity to remind him that old Mrs. Achey, one of his patients, had confided to her the painful news that she was "took violent with a swelling in her side," or an "income" as she described it, "and she wants you right away, Doctor—*immediately*. She says no one knows anything about incomes but Dr. Rolston," she added laughingly although confused in manner.

"An income, that is, an *assured income*, is the one thing I know nothing about," answered the doctor; "if I did . . . "

He searched Bessie's face for encouragement

but saw no reason to conclude that she had the slightest interest in him other than appreciation for the professional ability which had enabled him to alleviate her mother's sufferings

She was profuse in her thanks for his unfailing kindness and attention but displayed no personal interest.

So it happened that Bessie Grayson returned to her city home while the doctor went about his ceaseless round of calls, no one but the minister knowing of the disappointment and pain that was tugging at his heartstrings.

Chapter IX

A MODEST REQUEST

"I will a round, unvarnished tale deliver,
Of my whole course of love."

THE long, summer days passed happily away, filled with loving service for others.

Riding home on his wheel one evening at dusk, after visiting a sick member of the congregation who lived seven miles down the road, Angus espied Helen waiting for him at the manse gate.

The early fall had set in, and the lawn was covered thickly with the red and gold of the maple. The sentinel trees, shorn of their beauty, stretched forth bare, appealing arms, and marvelled at the tragedy of their fate, little knowing that *life* and not death was the cause of their nakedness.

The autumn frost had brought the color to Helen's cheek and an added brightness to her eye, and Angus lost no time in dismounting from his wheel in order to secure a nearer view.

"Oh, Angus!" exclaimed Helen, as she locked her arm in that of her husband, "what do you think? I have had a letter from Jean and she is coming at last to pay her long-promised visit. I'm so delighted! She was such a dear! Oh, I *do* wish, Angus, we could find a real good husband for Jean—I

would like her to be as happy as I am," she added, giving her husband's arm a loving little squeeze.

"All right, Helen. I get in my work at the end rather than at the beginning of match making. However, I am willing to promote any scheme you suggest. Had you any desirable suitor in mind?"

"Well, that's the trouble," and Helen's brow puckered anxiously. "There is Dr. Rolston, but he is never serious. He is very—how shall I describe it—impartial. Of course, he is as nice as nice can be but my prophetic soul tells me that he is absolutely impossible."

Helen knew nothing of the doctor's heart story and its tragic ending.

"Well, what about John Matheson of Beresford, the salt of the earth? He is good material! the very best!"

"Not Mr. Matheson, the minister, Angus? Why, Jean Sinclair would never marry a minister—*never!* Not if he got down on his knees to her," added Helen emphatically.

"Well perhaps *not*, if he got down on his knees to her, an attitude, by the way, which I could hardly conceive of John Matheson striking—but supposing he stood up to his job, like the man he is," suggested Angus, with Scottish tenacity, "what then?"

"The idea is simply preposterous, Angus, you dear, blundering, old thing! Jean simply cannot endure ministers! It's the strangest thing, too," she added reflectively, "for her father was a minister,

although she rarely speaks of him. She feels so badly when she does that I am always very careful to avoid making any reference to him."

"She did not appear particularly enthusiastic over you marrying a minister, did she, little girl?"

"Truth compels me to state that she did not," answered Helen.

"You seem to be bearing up under your cross bravely, however," cheerfully suggested Angus, as he guided her carefully over the leaf-strewn ground.

"Bearing up, Angus MacDonald! I never was so happy in all my life! The people are lovely to me—beyond my wildest dreams—and I am sure it is not that I deserve it, not in the very least," with a little sigh. "I only wish that my education had included a three year's course in Bible study, but then you see, I really had no idea in the world of marrying a minister, and how did I know that I'd ever need it?—that is . . . "

"Sure enough, Helen!—although an extra course in Bible study would hardly come amiss in any calling, would it?"

"Oh, I don't mean that, Angus, you know I don't. Really, I suspect you could be very nasty at times, that is if you were not so nice, you know! But there! I almost forgot to tell you. A man has been waiting to see you for some time. He says his business is most important and simply cannot wait, and here you have not had a bite of supper," added Helen, sympathetically.

"Haven't I though? I can count four up to date. Everywhere I called I was urged to eat, so I have partaken freely of apple pie, pumpkin pie, raisin pie . . . "

"Angus MacDonald! It's a wonder you survive to tell the tale! An ignoble and inglorious end will yet be yours," Helen prophesied, fearful for his impending fate as he stored away his bicycle, and hurriedly gathering an armful of the red and gold leaves showered them over his wife's fair hair.

Great was the minister's surprise when on entering the parlor he discovered the caller to be none other than Jonathan Redbeard, a much bereaved individual of about sixty winters, who had, up to date guided three wives along a short but tortuous journey to their heavenly home.

This was testified unto by the three stones in the nearby cemetery erected to their respective and revered memories.

Anne headed the list—from seniority, or merit, who shall say?

In memory of
ANNE
Beloved wife of
JONATHAN REDBEARD

"Her day was done
Ere scarce begun.
I ne'er can find
Another one."

To MARTHA

Second and dearly beloved wife
of the aforesaid Jonathan,

"Poor Martha is no more;
To Heaven she did soar."

To AMANDA,

Third dearly beloved and lamented wife
of the before referred to Jonathan.

"Amanda's laid away
Until the Judgment Day.
May nothing disturb her sweet rest.
Of the three, she sure was the best."

A gradual and convincing crescendo Angus had mentally decided when these heart-wrung epitaphs had on occasion met his eye.

"Well, Jonathan, how are you?" enquired the minister heartily, as he took his hand and directed him to a chair more suited to his generous proportions, and less likely to suffer collapse than was the small reception chair upon which he had been vainly endeavoring to balance himself.

"I am very well, Mr. MacDonald, very well indeed, seeing all I have been called to pass through, with three women lying out there side by side—all

as good, hard-working women as any living man could ask or wish for."

"You have been greatly blessed in that way, Jonathan, but doubtless that only causes you to feel your losses more keenly." In his soul, the minister marvelled greatly how such a bewhiskered, wolfish-appearing member of society had succeeded in luring, in their several turns, three defenceless females to his lair. In what antics could he have indulged to secure his end—and their end too, alas?

Jonathan's appearance, however, belied him greatly. Underneath a rather forbidding exterior was hidden, or more properly speaking *exposed* a warm and well-developed heart. This would naturally be expected of an organ which was so frequently called upon to exercise its functions. It was preserved in good form and suffered not from hardened arteries, nor yet from fatty degeneration.

He did his duty by each wife in her individual turn. He was devotion itself, nor did he ever extol the virtues of a former wife to the wife pro tem.

He was loudly appreciative of their fine points—at home and abroad. His love was not of that weak and spineless character which can be kept securely hidden away under the heart's debris until its very existence is a matter of conjecture.

No, Jonathan was goodness itself while each and all walked this gloomy vale. In their respective order, he followed each one with loud lamentations to the brink of the grave, protesting that he could

no longer live and begging to be allowed to sleep by her side.

Ever thinking better of it, he revoked his decision at the last moment, deciding, doubtless, that "twere better to bear the ills he had than fly to others that he knew not of," or in language less Shakespearian and more up-to-date, Jonathan decided to "carry on."

But we will close the page of Jonathan's much-becheckered career and return to the manse, where he and the minister are seated discussing some question which seems to have had a rejuvenating effect upon the sorely afflicted Jonathan.

With the prospect of taking unto himself a fourth, in the person of Matilda Standby, the fashion of his countenance was changed. He realized that while life lasted, there was hope! He thoroughly believed the old proverb to the effect that "there were as good fish in the sea as ever were caught," and Jonathan Redbeard, though to the casual observer lacking in persuasive bait, had proven himself outstanding as a successful angler.

"Yes, Mr. Minister, it is six months past and gone since my poor Amanda was took. A long, weary time for a man to be alone, which was never intended a man should be according to scripture as you will bear me out, Mr MacDonald, which reads plain: 'It is not good for man to be alone.' No more is it, knocking around the world with rheumatism twisting at his knee joints of a night, and no hot

vittles set out for him when he gets home from his day's moil and toil."

"I don't doubt but it must be hard on you Jonathan, but pardon me if I suggest that four—that is, four wives I mean—is rather a generous allotment for any *one* man. It appears like cornering the matrimonial market. Your affections must be very elastic."

"No man, nor woman neither, can ever say I did not make every one of the women I took happy in their day and turn. *No man can do more!*" and Jonathan settled firmly back on his chair with a Q. E. D. expression.

"Jonathan, you are a philosopher! Your wisdom and grasp of the subject are profound and your arguments both convincing and illuminating. To bring it down to a simple problem in mathematics, it resolves itself into this:—

"Which is the greater accomplishment, to have made *one* woman happy for life, or to have made *four* women happy for life?

"Is not the latter, indeed, a fourfold accomplishment," questioned the minister, inwardly wondering what Helen would think of such a line of argument.

"Well, I'm glad you've come round to my way of thinking, Mr. MacDonald. To tell the truth, I was slow about speaking to you of taking another woman, but now I have the minister's approval, there's nothin' else standin' in the way. I'll just fetch her along to-morrow and you will do the job

for us," suggested the would-be bridegroom, cheerfully.

"As regards my approval, I wouldn't just care to place myself on record as *approving*! However, bring Miss Standby along to-morrow at two o'clock. I must go to a meeting in a short time now, Jonathan, so good-bye, and good luck!

"Don't forget the license. Of course you know it is necessary to secure one."

"None knows better, seein' as this is the fourth one I have bought and paid out good money for. It comes hard on any *one* man paying for so many, they should let me have this one cheaper. I'll try to beat them down a bit! You won't mind if I bring you a bag of turnips for doing the job, this being the fourth time I've paid for the same, never gettin' no further ahead!"

"No, Jonathan!" answered Mr. MacDonald. "If you want a wife you will pay in good, hard cash, and no exchange taken."

"Well, if I have to, I have to, I suppose, and I won't let it stand in the way of Matilda gettin' me, but passin' through what I have, I ain't able to pay no fancy price to ministers."

And thus did Jonathan Redbeard lay bare the weak point in his matrimonial armor. Could the eulogized three find voice, they would have doubtless expressed a desire for a generous mixture of hard cash with the love so freely bestowed, in preference to an abundant supply of the latter in undiluted form!

Chapter X

JEAN SINCLAIR

"Princely of mien—modest though deferent, tender hearted—though of fearless blood."

JEAN SINCLAIR, the long-looked-for visitor, had now been a welcome guest at the manse for several days. As Helen predicted, she proved to be a thoroughly delightful and satisfactory visitor—bright, considerate and adaptable.

Who indeed should conform more readily to manse conditions than Jean Sinclair, whose years up to early womanhood had been spent under the sheltering roof of a manse in a village many hundred miles from Bloomfield.

It was a dark, gloomy afternoon in early November. Helen and Jean were seated before the crackling open fire in the wide, cheery living-room which had fulfilled all Helen's expectations. The end of the room, which commanded the river and the blue hills in the distance, had been converted into a sun-parlor and here grew flowers and hanging ferns in profusion. The dark green of the foliage provided a striking background for the bright-hued geraniums and begonias; and here Helen's canary found a veritable paradise and at times rent the air with his full-throated song.

Great easy chairs placed by softly-shaded lights stretched out their hospitable arms and invited rest. Low bookshelves, on either side of the fireplace, and magazines convenient to hand testified to a love of reading and a desire to have material within easy reach.

In a corner stood Helen's grand piano, the gift of her father. A priceless piece of old-world tapestry hung over the deep mantel upon which was placed a quaint, old, blue delft bowl filled with rose-hued chrysanthemums.

The flickering firelight set the room aglow, and here and there touched into prominence a valued piece of pottery, or pictured art treasure. Jean Sinclair's dark beauty was enchanced by her surroundings. The fitful firelight played hide and seek in the glossy strands of her hair and discovered its burnished waves of changing hues. It lit up the great, dark eyes with their ever-changing expression, and cast an added charm on the bright face as she reclined luxuriously in a comfortable Morris chair, her little, slippered feet propped upon the fender and a volume of Tennyson in her hand.

Unconsciously, she allowed her eyes to wander in the direction of her hostess, whose industrious fingers were shaping a tiny garment for a motherless child.

Silently Jean concluded that up to date Helen's marriage to a minister had not been her undoing. If anything, she was prettier than ever, and Angus was certainly a devoted husband. Of course, one

never could be sure that husbands in general—or in particular—would be as kind and considerate as Angus MacDonald had proven himself to be. All husbands might not be so willing to overlook one's inevitable shortcomings and magnify one's hopeful points, always providing, of course, that any such were visible to the naked eye.

Perhaps—and Jean cast a fleeting glance down the long, lonely years stretching ahead—perhaps—under some circumstances—if an Angus MacDonald were to present himself—one *might*—under prolonged pressure, consider "changing one's state."

The reference to a "state" started Jean off upon a new, though rather disquieting, line of thought.

The expression had been a favorite one in the phraseology of one Mrs. McGollop, who had officiated at the washtub in Jean's early home when the latter, as a growing girl, was just peering out into the untracked future of romance.

Mrs. McGollop possessed a clear-cut, verbal way of reaching the root of a matter, which would put to confusion many a public speaker whose point is at times obscured by a maze of words.

She had been unfortunate in the selection of a life partner, which sad fact was borne out by prophecy as she was wont to explain to all such sentimental, misguided damsels as hoped to receive revelations through sleeping on wedding cake for the purpose of beholding, in a dream, their husbands to be.

"I slept on weddin' cake, once," volunteered the

unromantic Mrs. McGollop. "I dream't nothing *and I got Nothing!*" in a tone which suggested finality.

None dare question the verity of her statement, nor would any be inclined to do so had it been their privilege to know Mr. McGollop, a man who entangled himself not with the sordidness of this life. He handed over all worldy responsibility to the consideration of his helpmeet while he smoked the pipe of peace on his own threshold, far removed from the carking care of this mundane sphere.

Subconsciously, Jean was indulging in these dreams of olden days when the door opened, and without any preliminaries the small maid-of-all-work ushered in the Reverend John Matheson of Beresford.

A man, he was, whose appearance inspired confidence. His gaze, while impersonal, was clear and penetrating and his manner carried with it an implied deference to womanhood and to all for which womanhood stands.

He was about forty years of age—tall, muscular, with broad shoulders and well-knit limbs. His heavy, brown, refractory hair was inclined to unministerial waves. A broad forehead; deeply-set dark grey eyes; straight and prominent nose; strong jaw and chin; a firmly-moulded mouth, round which many a sweet and tender thought had drawn kindly little lines of gentle smiling. Such, briefly, was the description of John Matheson.

Several years had passed since he, as a young graduate into the ministry, had been inducted into the charge of Beresford. Through his untiring labor, fearlessness of opposition, and devotion to his ideals, he had gained the confidence and co-operation of his people, and the Christian community life of Beresford and the surrounding country was recognized far and wide.

Since the passing of his invalid mother who had been his sole companion, and to whom he was devoted, he had lived alone in the old, stone, ivy-covered manse, with a well-meaning, though garrulous housekeeper looking well—aye, too well—to his worldy needs.

Much valuable time was spent hearkening to her well-meant advice regarding affairs temporal. This worthy and privileged individual would dwell volubly upon the desirable qualities of some young woman who, in her estimation, possessed all the necessary attributes for a minister's wife, being able "to lay her hand to anything." Others she would denounce unmercifully as being unfitted both by nature and *calling* for such a position, the latter being a most conclusive and overwhelming argument.

"Why, Mr. Matheson! Come right in. What a lovely surprise you've given us! You're very welcome. I am so sorry Angus is not in at present but he soon will be back. You will wait until he comes, won't you? Take off your coat and come over to the fire," urged Helen, hospitably.

John Matheson, having had a glimpse of the cosy, inviting room and the crackling grate, not to mention the two occupants, one of whom he knew well to be a delightful hostess, was far from loath to accept the invitation.

Following Helen's advice he hung his hat and greatcoat in the hall, and came forward to the welcome fire.

"Jean, I want you to meet the Rev. John Matheson of Beresford, a very particular friend of ours of whom you have often heard us speak," said Helen, inwardly hoping that the explanation would influence Jean into accepting the introduction to a minister, with her usual grace of manner.

"Mr. Matheson, this is my dearest girl friend, Jean Sinclair."

Then, glancing at Jean nervously—

"Now, Mr. Matheson, sit down in this comfortable chair. Let me put these pillows behind you—this deep chair simply demands them. We are just going to have tea and you will have some with us. You know there is really no one hurrying you home, *especially*," added Helen, intent upon setting out her pretty, bridal china on the low-set tea table.

"What a delightfully irresponsible position is yours, Mr. Matheson," suggested Jean, when their guest was comfortably ensconsed in the big, cushioned armchair. "May I congratulate you upon being able to exercise the power of free will to such an extent in your manse—none daring to molest

or make you afraid, as it were," she added, with a merry flash of her dark eyes.

"Thank you very much, Miss Sinclair. I don't doubt your congratulations are tendered from the kindest motives, but I'm sometimes at a loss to decide whether my condition is one that should call forth congratulation or commiseration. There is much to uphold the latter theory," he said, as he noted for the first time the bright, animated face of the young girl who sat across the fire from him. Her youth awakened in him a kindly interest, such as he might have felt for one of the lambs of his flock.

He was not sure that she would be considered beautiful, measured by certain standards, but she looked so young, so untried by the world. And her eyes—yes, her eyes were out of the common—their dark, dreamy depths betrayed sorrow as well as mirth.

Recalling himself quickly from his unwonted reverie and shocked at his own temerity, he realized that Miss Sinclair was speaking to him,

"Everything is in favor of congratulations, by *all* means, Mr. Matheson. Just think of your glorious independence, your magnificent isolation, with a conscience at rest and assured of Pauline approval!"

"Whatever can you mean, Jean? I can't see what Paul has to do with it," interrupted Helen, fearing a breach of the peace and replying at random to Jean's remarks which had highly amused their guest, judging from his expression.

"You mustn't take Miss Sinclair too seriously, Mr. Matheson," continued Helen. "Jean is a dear," twining her arm reassuringly round her friend, "but—well, I might as well tell you the truth —*she does not like ministers! Why*, I could never imagine, for of course there are *ministers*—and *ministers!*"

"Helen," answered Jean with outward confusion, "your remarks are very misleading and not at all calculated to inspire confidence in my powers of discrimination."

"Well, for the sake of the cause and, on behalf of the church militant, I trust you have a mind unprejudiced and open to conviction, Miss Sinclair. We are only men, you know—men with a vision, perhaps," answered John Matheson, a kindly smile playing round the corners of his mouth.

"Yes, I understand," replied Jean, humbly, with a quick flash of understanding.

"I have had a very trying day, Mrs. MacDonald. I'm afraid I'll be but poor company," he added, and an expression of unutterable sadness passed over his face.

"I am so sorry," said Helen, her ready sympathy aroused. "Is there anything we could do? Would you care to tell us about it?"

"I should hardly introduce the subject but I think you already know something of the case. Will you pardon me for a moment, Miss Sinclair, if I speak of it? I hesitate to interfere with your pleasure . . . "

"Oh, Mr. Matheson, I hope you don't believe me to be so unsympathic and indifferent to the sorrow of others. I am sorry you think so poorly of me—please let me hear too," she added, pleadingly, her dark eyes searching his face for reassurance and consent.

"Why, I didn't doubt your kindness of heart, not in the least, but I didn't wish to burden you with a minister's anxieties and troubles."

"You see, Mr. Matheson," interrupted Helen, much disturbed in mind and jealous for her friend, "it is not the work of the ministry with which Jean is out of sympathy—do not think that! How stupidly I must have expressed myself. Why, she is the best . . . "

Words failed Helen for the moment.

"Then I am to conclude that it is the minister himself, with whom Miss Sinclair is out of sympathy," replied John Matheson, with that merry twinkle in his eyes which lopped off the years with their crushing burden, and left him a boy again.

"Anyhow, there is *one* minister for whom I have a profound respect," affirmed Jean with a glance at Helen, "and on his account, I find my charity extending and trust that it may, in time, embrace all the brethren."

"So may it be!" responded John Matheson, whose fleeting curiosity tempted him to wonder if he would be included in the embrace!

"But of course you know, Jean, there is really only one Angus MacDonald—you mustn't look

for perfection, broadcast," said Helen. "But we have interrupted you, Mr. Matheson. Won't you let us share your anxiety?"

"Thank you, Mrs. MacDonald," after some hesitation, "I think you already know something of the case. You remember young Doctor Drayton. One of the cleverest men who ever graduated from our medical schools!"

"I didn't know him personally, but I've often heard of him, Mr. Matheson. He was so good to a poor widow in our congregation. I heard Angus say that he drove over the drifted roads on the coldest, stormiest day last winter—he really saved her life! When he reached the home he found there was nothing in the house to eat, so he turned back over the almost impassable roads and brought food for the children. He refused to take anything for his services later when the poor woman offered to pay."

"Yes! I can quite believe it of him. Poor fellow! He has done many acts of that description, Mrs. MacDonald. He was deeply interested in anything that would benefit the community, and, strange to say, he was one of the strongest temperance advocates.

"Before he left the village, he was a regular attendant at church and my right-hand man. When we met such strong opposition from the few who were opposed to public libraries and uplifting plays given by our church people, he worked with me to overcome their prejudices. It was unfor-

tunate that he did not stay in Beresford. He could not have gone to a worse town than Baxton."

Here he paused and looked long into the leaping flames. "He had one weakness—an inherited appetite—the craving for drink possessed him at certain intervals. It seemed a form of disease."

"Then you *do* believe it to be a form of disease, Mr. Matheson, don't you, and that the victim is more to be pitied than condemned?"

"I do, indeed, Miss Sinclair," he answered with assurance. "I have seen that poor fellow put up many a strong fight against it, but it won out in the end—I laid him away to-day, in his early manhood."

Silence ensued—and all eyes were riveted on the flickering fire.

A bright flame kindled—mounted aloft with soaring ambition, and died suddenly away, leaving nothing but the grey ashes of disappointment.

"Oh, Mr. Matheson, at whose door will the blame be laid? The pity of it all—the crying waste!" exclaimed Jean, her sympathetic nature touched to its depths. "You say he loved his neighbor; that his hands were ever outstretched to the needy! Dare we condemn him because he was not strong enough to combat a disease from which *we* have never suffered?

"Oh, forgive me if I appear unorthodox! He loved much—therefore he was forgiven much. I believe—oh, I can't help but believe—he has gone 'sweeping through the gates'! Tell me you agree

with me Mr. Matheson,'' she earnestly entreated.

"God grant it, Miss Sinclair. 'To his own Master he standeth or falleth,' answered John Matheson with bowed head.

Here, Susanna entered with the tea—a timely diversion, as poor Helen's tender heart was very sad over the untimely death of the young doctor and she found no words in which to express the sorrow to which her tear-stained eyes bore evidence.

The conversation took a more cheerful turn as the hostess hospitably urged the guests to partake freely of her cake, which had long since attained unto the proportions set forth by Mrs. Wise of the "Handy Hints," and Helen was gratified to behold them both doing ample justice to her handiwork.

"Helen, won't you sing for us?" requested Jean, as the tea cups were removed. "Something cheerful, you know—not from the grand, old masters," she added as she lay back in her chair with a weary gesture. "'To-night, I long for rest,' to quote from the rather world-weary, old gentleman in the poem."

"Why, Jean! Whatever is the matter, dear? I'm afraid you must be ill—I never knew *you* to be tired before," enquired Helen, with deep concern.

"I fear that I'm responsible, Mrs. MacDonald. It was very thoughtless of me to introduce such a painful subject. I trust you and Miss Sinclair will pardon me. I'm a plain, out-spoken man and—and have been little used to women of late."

"I am perfectly well, Helen, and, Mr. Matheson, I hope you won't for a moment blame yourself.

You have done me so much good, I like your treatment of a subject," she added, with a quick return of her usual vivacity and brightness of spirit.

"Would you like me to sing 'Annie Laurie' for you?" enquired Helen, as she looked through some music that was lying open on the piano. "I know Mr. Matheson has long since passed the impressionable stage and perhaps will not appreciate its sentiment. As for you Jean—you never have, and I fear never will, reach the sentimental stage!"

"Where would you place the age limit on sentiment Mrs. MacDonald?" enquired John Matheson. "I tremble to think I may have passed it unwittingly!"

"Helen is an authority on such matters, Mr. Matheson. You have appealed to the right source for information," cheerfully encouraged Jean.

"Well, you see, Angus was twenty-six when he fell in love with me. I believe there have been occasional and exceptional cases where men have fallen in love—and very deeply too—at a later date, possibly at even thirty-five or thirty-six—but they are rare cases!"

"Woe is me! I am undone!" was the Rev. John Matheson's inward comment. "I have reached —aye, and well nigh passed—the impressionable age! I am numbered among the ineligibles, and justly so!" Unconsciously, his eyes turned towards Jean. What a sweet, sympathetic face, Miss Sinclair possessed, to be sure!

Such thoughts were not calculated to promote

peace in the calm, well-seasoned breast of John Matheson, as the tender notes of "Annie Laurie" stole through his senses.

Helen MacDonald possessed one of those sympathetic, soul-searching voices, which brought joy and sorrow, tears and laughter, so close that the unseen became real and the realities faded away into the unseen.

"And for bonnie Annie Laurie,
I'd lay me doon and dee . . . "

As the tones died away a silence hung over the fire-lit room like a dirge. John Matheson gazed at the burning coals apparently lost in thought.

Helen repeated softly the closing refrain, and Jean, determined that no one should accuse her of being affected by mere sentiment, choked back the lump in her throat and endeavored to break the spell.

"Poor Annie! Tradition states that she lived to be over eighty and died—sans teeth—sans eyes—sans hair!"

"Jean Sinclair! How dare you lay profane hands on Annie Laurie and attempt to steal away our illusions? I don't believe a word of it, do you, Mr. Matheson?" interrupted Helen with righteous indignation.

"Well, truthfully speaking, Mrs. MacDonald, I have never read any authentic account of Annie's declining years, but I rather suspect, from the sentiments of the song that hers was a love match to

begin with, and one would prefer to believe that a love so loudly proclaimed would attend her down the years, as probably it did."

"It has been whispered abroad, that at times those who make the loudest protestations of being willing to *die* for others, are strangely indisposed to *live* and *work* for them!" volunteered Jean, with that little expression in the curve of her mouth which boded mischief.

"Do not pay any attention to her, Mr. Matheson! She doesn't mean what she is saying. If you only knew how good she is—and how clever!"

"Helen, you cover me with confusion," protested her friend with ill-concealed embarrassment. "You will certainly prejudice Mr. Matheson against me. *Clever!* of all things! That is the most unkindest cut of all. Any man prefers amiable stupidity in a woman to cleverness. Isn't that so Mr. Matheson?" enquired Jean, as their guest rose to take his departure.

"I'm not in a position at present to pronounce upon the subject, Miss Sinclair. May I give you my opinion at a later date," smiling down upon the bright, eager face which looked so teasingly into his own.

"Why, I'd be very glad," stammered Jean, annoyed at her sudden lack of composure as John Matheson's smile rendered his face more than ordinarily handsome, lit up the deep, grey eyes and displayed a depth of sincerity and goodness reflected from his honest soul.

"Now, Jean, isn't he a dear?" enquired Helen, as, their visitor gone, they returned to the cosy fire for a chat. "You have no idea how good he is and how his people worship him! I can't begin to tell you what he has done for them. Why, he has transformed the whole life of the neighborhood. His charge is a regular Utopia. If you were not so awfully opposed to ministers, Jean, and Mr. Matheson were not *years* too old for you, I would try and have you meet oftener. Unfortunately though he is not the falling-in-love kind! Anyway, a man of that age would want a sensible, settled-down girl of mature years, at least, that is the kind of a wife he should have, don't you think so, Jean?"

"I really don't think anything about it, Helen. If Mr. Matheson is as old as you suggest, I would imagine he could be safely left to make his own selection. Generally speaking, I wouldn't have considered him so advanced in years as to be incapable of regulating his own matrimonial affairs," and Jean gave the fire an involuntary little poke which sent the sparks flying in all directions.

"Well he's nice, anyhow," continued Helen, marvelling at Jean's apparent lack of interest. "Tomorrow, I must have you meet Dr. Rolston. He is really the most delightful company, and perfectly charming to any young ladies who are visiting in Bloomfield. He takes them out occasionally with him to see his patients and makes it so pleasant for them. Of course, it's only out of consideration

for the hostess whom they are visiting; he never pays any one special attention."

"I'm deeply impressed by your description. I shall look forward with palpitating heart to the morrow," and Jean involuntarily glanced down the leaf strewn road, which a tall figure in the pride and strength of manhood had just traversed.

The sound of wheels in the near distance announced the approach of Angus, and Helen made an unceremonious exit, leaving Jean to gaze at the distorted remains of the pine stumps as they blazed and crackled in the grate.

"No depth to them—all noise and sparkle," philosophized Jean. "Like some people! Personally, I prefer more depth and less sparkle in both men and stumps, though why I should associate the two I'm sure I don't know! Generally speaking, they are not analogous terms!

"How absurd to speak of Mr. Matheson as old! I wonder what he meant. For the moment I almost forgot he was a minister. I really am not so very young, even in years," mused Jean, "and counting time by heart throbs, there are times when I feel I could have written the history of the early Britons, myself, from personal knowledge and observation. There is Angus now! How happy Angus and Helen are! I am so glad for her sake," she added, smothering a little sigh as she went out to join them over the cheerful supper table.

In the meantime, the Rev. John Matheson was wending his way to his lonely manse in a frame of

mind which could hardly be described as calm or placid. For some strange and unaccountable reason his serenity had been disturbed.

The old, stone manse, sentinelled by leafless maples and surrounded by dejected shrubbery, looked particularly uninviting. His thoughts persisted in straying back to the cosy home at Bloomfield, and to "the stranger within its gates." "A very sweet and charming girl! I wonder what sorrow has entered her young life to cause that weary look in her eyes! She is too young—yes, and far too pretty to know of life's burdens. She should be sheltered from the cares and troubles of this world. If I only dared!

"John Matheson, don't be a fool! You must be suffering from what the ancients described as a gleam of old moonlight in the blood.

"I'm sorry, though, that she should be so prejudiced against ministers. On behalf of the Church, I think I should perhaps, yes, I almost feel it to be my duty to endeavor to give her a different viewpoint. Such a sweet, appealing manner she has! I'm afraid she may have already been called upon to pass through the deep waters. If I could

. . .

"Now, John Matheson! The infirmities of age are fast laying hold upon you! You are losing your mental grip—nothing else can account for your unaccountable interest in a mere stranger! Remember too, you are old—old as Troy."

His musings were cut short by a voice he recog-

nized as that of his well-meaning but garrulous housekeeper.

"Come away in out of the wet, Mr. Matheson—come away! I do declare you're gettin' more ill to do with every day," announced this much-privileged individual. "Here you are, maunderin' around in the garden, and it teemin' rain—which is no way for a man of *your* years to be carryin' on, so it ain't! Come away in and set by the fire. I've layed out good three-ply socks for you. Your feet are wet, I'll warrant, which is just the way my brother John Thomas got his *death*, troubles never comin' singly neither. I mind well as we lost a fine beast the same year, which was took with chills as I'm feared for you takin' the same, being as you're gettin' on in years—which is no shame for folks if they be makin' out to live right, as is gospel truth and no one able to deny it!"

"Do I look so very old, Mrs. Gumpsey?" enquired the proud descendant of a hundred Scots, stooping from his high and independent estate.

"Well, now that you ask me, I will say that you wear your age wonderful for a man of your years, you're well-preserved! Which minds me of a head-line as used to be in one of our old copy books at school—my memory bein' that bad since John Thomas was took that I can't mind things as I used to, but I think it ran like this,

'Year following year steals something every-
day;
At length it steals us from ourselves away.'

"Beggin' your pardon for mentionin' it, but it seemed fittin' when you spoke of gettin' on in years."

"Pardon me, but, I didn't speak of getting on in years, Mrs. Gumpsey, I feel as young as ever I did."

"To be sure you do, Mr. Matheson, which you should and no blame for you neither! I heard with my own ears, old Josiah Wilkins who's ninety if he's a day, talkin' about poor Jimmy Jackson of the back line who was buried yesterday, him just after passin' his seventy-ninth birthday. Says Josiah, 'Young man was Jimmy to be taken away in the midst of his days.' Yes, you're good for many a day yet, Mr. Matheson, providin' you don't get your knee joints all twisted up with rheumatiz, and get bed rid from standin' round in wet socks gazin' over at Bloomfield village like as if you'd never set eyes on it afore.

"Come away, now! Here are your socks, all warmed. Take a good drink of this boneset tea and wrap this bit of red flannel and goose-grease well round your neck.

"Ministers should know better than to be standin' round in the rain, temptin' of Providence to warp up their limbs till they're no more account than a couple of pine stumps—so they should.

"I do feel I must speak my mind, which as you well know is rare and unusual in me, Mr. Matheson, *you are old enough to know better*,—which is more's the pity, I say!

"Well, since you won't take the boneset tea or wear the bit of red flannel, you can't lay your pains and aches at *my* door when they come, as come they will—I have done my duty by you!"

"You have indeed, Mrs. Gumpsey," responded John Matheson, "it will be no fault of yours if my age be not 'as a lusty winter'."

Chapter XI

DR. ROLSTON

"He hath a daily beauty in his life."

TRUE to Helen's predictions, Dr. Rolston made his appearance at the manse on the evening following the visit from the Rev. John Matheson, and a delightful companion he proved himself to be. His presence created an atmosphere of cheer and well-being. He was one of those companionable souls abounding in health and spirits and possessed of an inexhaustible sense of humor.

Whatever were his personal disappointments or his professional anxieties, he kept them carefully hidden away from the public gaze, and found his happiness in contributing to that of others, and in doing his bit to make his little corner of the world a better place in which to live.

Angus MacDonald, alone, knew how the doctor's heart hungered for the young girl whom he loved with the whole strength of his manhood, and who was so hopelessly removed from his reach.

Such well-nigh insurmountable barriers do wealth and social position interpose.

Jean Sinclair and Dr. Rolston were pronounced friends from the first minute of introduction. That

happy condition might be accounted for on the ground of telepathy, but doubtless it was even more due to the fact that Jean was not the sentimental type of maiden, who in every man, be he old or young, handsome or unprepossessing, rich or poor, beholds a sure suitor and a possible husband and assumes an attitude in keeping with her relations to be.

Thus they thoroughly understood one another and their friendship promised to be most wholesome and helpful. They discussed books and music, peered into science and philosophy, and recognized the hidden humor in the turn of a word. In the course of one short evening they had journeyed far on the way towards the solution of many problems relating to the physical, spiritual and ethical side of man—not to mention woman!

The evening was drawing to a close. The fire had burned low in the grate, and the charred remains of the pine stumps had assumed distorted shapes which grinned out at Jean and the doctor in all their blackened and hideous deformity.

"Do give the fire a poke, Dr. Rolston, it looks positively gruesome," requested Jean, with an involuntary shudder. "It almost shatters one's faith in an eternal and prevailing good. A grate fire has a tendency to make me reminiscent, and alas! to create in me a longing for the things I can never hope to have," sighed Jean. "It leads me to a weak stretching forth of impotent hands in the prayer

that they may be filled with God's best gifts, not daring to choose for myself."

For a time all was still in the fire-lit, shadowy room.

"Does the firelight affect you in that way, Doctor? enquired Jean, in a subdued tone, her dark eyes turned searchingly towards the doctor, who was silently gazing into the fire, apparently lost in deep thought.

"Well, really, Miss Sinclair," he answered after some hesitation, "I admit that to gaze into the dying embers has rather a disquieting effect. But I have an infallible cure for all longings and disappointments."

"What is it, may I ask?" demanded Jean eagerly.

"Work! just work and yet more work! Just a plain every-day remedy within the reach of all. I find it a panacea for all ills—that is, to a great extent," he qualified, with a sigh. "That reminds me! My rounds, to-morrow, include a visit to a family at Beresford. It's hardly the time of the year to see the country at its best but I'd count it a great pleasure if I might be allowed to take you for the drive."

"Thank you, ever so much. I'd be delighted to go. Did you say Beresford? Isn't that where Mr. Matheson, the minister, has wrought such miracles of social reform?"

"The very place! And a fortunate people they are to have such a man in their midst. They're never done proclaiming his excellencies, and the

remarkable part of it is that I know from personal knowledge they are speaking the truth. But, to change the subject, are you interested in scenery! there are really some fine bits on the road!"

"Oh, yes, by all means! That just reminds me, may I take my camera with me? Perhaps I might secure a few good snaps on the way. I promise not to take *your* picture providing I can discover any other object more interesting and picturesque," announced Jean with cheerful decision.

"I'm afraid then, that I shall not have the honor of being added to your collection, which sounds as though I might have had hopes of figuring as a rare specimen—an anthropological monster, for instance."

"Oh, no!" laughingly responded Jean, "I really have no special interest in antiquarian research, none in the least. To prove it, let me show you a few of my snapshots. You might consider yourself a proud man to be numbered among these *immortelles*," she added, bringing out her precious album with alacrity to show the doctor the pictures of her friends which she herself had taken, and of which she was justly proud.

Shortly after the doctor's arrival that evening, Helen had been summoned to the study, and after an incredible lapse of time was still held prisoner by one of the parishioners—a misguided individual, who, while waiting for the minister, seized the occasion to enlighten his wife regarding the surest and most effectual manner in which to treat a domestic

animal should it become suddenly afflicted with cramps.

"Just take a butcher knife, ma'am—the sharper the better, and stab the beast below the third rib," he advised as hitching his chair closer to Helen, he began a detailed and graphic description of the necessary steps to be taken in order to relieve the wretched animal's sufferings. "Be very careful-like to hit the right spot, the same needing practice. There are those who have hit the wrong place, mistaking the fourth rib for the third, and the unfortunate beast has doubled up in a heap at their feet, ma'am—more's the pity! But if you're careful, and go exact according to this chart I have in my pocket, which I'll explain once I have my glasses, you needn't fear! She'll be as good as new and walking off to her fodder before you can get the butcher knife back on the dinner table—she will, that! and the minister'll be taking her milk on his porridge next morning, he will indeed, ma'am!"

Poor Helen writhed in her chair, but her education was still unfinished.

"That reminds me, now," continued the worthy and well-informed individual. "As I was coming up the walk to the manse, I saw a tree that needs doctoring up a bit. Now, ma'am, you won't take it unkindly of me if I tell you how to save it. I've doctored up many a one, and explained how to go about it to more folks than I could count, that I have ma'am and no mistake! Just take a good, sharp spade—the bigger, the better— and dig down well

round the roots of the tree, loosening up the earth and making a trench of about two, or say three feet all round it.

"Then go out directly, lose no time, and get three or four dead dogs. Fetch them and lay them well round the roots of the tree, being careful to have their heads pointing due east to the rising sun, ma'am. Their tails not being so important (begging your pardon ma'am for mentioning them in your company) can point any way they happen to lay in the course of nature. Cover them well over with a few wheelbarrows of fresh loam, and take my word for it, Mrs. MacDonald, there'll be no such trees as yours in the village of Bloomfield, nor for miles round!"

Poor Helen would fain have made enquiry as to *how* and *where* she could possibly hope to secure *four dead dogs* and produce them at the crucial moment. She doubted greatly her ability to carry out all the gruesome details, but her fears and misgivings she kept carefully hidden.

As she dare not provoke another avalanche of information, she decided that her only safe policy was to accept the valuable, if somewhat misdirected information, and trust to a kindly fate that she would never be called upon to perform such heroic feats, as their accomplishment presented many obstacles to the uninitiated.

The entrance of her husband came as a timely relief, and Helen, with her advanced education, was permitted to rejoin her guests. During her en-

forced absence they had discovered many subjects of common interest, and were now seated under the rose-shaded light, turning over the pages of Jean's precious collection of snapshots.

"Why, Helen!" exclaimed Jean, "What could you and that old man possibly have found to talk about all that time? I caught a glimpse of his bewhiskered visage as he passed the door, and one brief glance almost established my belief in the Darwinian theory! Were you discussing evolution with him? He did not impress me at first sight as having evoluted very far!"

"Evolution? I should think not!" her wearied hostess replied, as she sank into the chair which the doctor had drawn invitingly up to the hearth. "I wish I could impart to you both some of the knowledge which it has been my lot to receive! Mine has been a very liberal education," explained Helen, with sudden vehemence.

"You have my deepest sympathy," laughed the doctor. "I attended him at one time and I can assure you that my professional knowledge counted for little or nothing. He had recourse to many an infallible remedy which had never, to my knowledge been emphasized in the study of therapeutics. Some of them, doubtless, would have formed valuable contributions to medical science. For instance, he had been suffering from rheumatism and his wife sent for me. I discovered the patient packed in mud from head to foot, with a dead cat strapped to each of his knees. He was bearing

up with great fortitude, and appeared strong in faith that his recovery was at hand!"

"How utterly ridiculous, what a deadly course of treatment," laughed Jean, while Helen, feeling the truth of the doctor's story, endeavored to drown the remembrance of the ghastly details incidental to the salvation of the unfortunate animal and the manse trees in a cup of chocolate which had long been awaiting her.

"I'm showing Dr. Rolston some of my pictures, Helen. He is good enough to pretend to be interested, although I expect he is bored to extinction. He has yet to realize the magnitude of his folly, however, for I have whole volumes in reserve, and they may descend upon his defenceless head at any moment."

Notwithstanding the fate that awaited him, the doctor seemed to be much interested in Jean's productions. As he turned over the pages, he decided that they were far and beyond the average snapshot. Instead of being caricatures of misguided and helpless victims, the pictures were artistically conceived and developed.

Suddenly the doctor's eyes were riveted to the page. His face paled but he held himself in a tight grip. Unconsciously he passed his hand over his eyes as if to obtain a clearer vision.

Could it be possible? Surely that sweet face looking out at him from the open page belonged to the one woman in the world for whom his heart cried out in hunger! Bessie Grayson! Her face,

and yet not her face, as he had known it in those far-off bright days. He was quick to detect a different expression. Sorrow had touched her young life and left its indelible impression. He surely must be mistaken! No! No—he could not be! Those sweet eyes, so changed and saddened, they were—they must be—Bessie Grayson's!

It was over two years now since she had passed out of his life. Shortly after her departure from Bloomfield, the doctor had left for Edinburgh, where he remained for several months, taking up some post-graduate work in connection with his chosen profession. Incidentally, he had heard that Bessie Grayson was shortly to be married to the only son of a wealthy family whose name was unknown to him. Forcing her from his thoughts as best he could, he had never again spoken of her to Angus MacDonald who was his sole confidant. The minister, not considering it a kindness to his friend to introduce the name of Bessie Grayson, trusted that time might heal the wound, and kept his silence.

"You seem deeply impressed by that picture, Dr. Rolston. You have not turned a page for five minutes. Which one is it?" enquired Jean, leaning forward to catch a glimpse.

With quick compulsion, the doctor brought himself back to earth and his environments.

"Oh, yes, that is Mrs. Jack Burnie, you know—of Burnie and Son, Montreal," explained Jean, her eyes directed upon the opposite page from that upon which the doctor's gaze was fixed. "Did you

know her? She was one of my very dear girl friends."

"Yes—no—that is, not very well," stammered the helpless victim. "I knew her slightly—her mother was a patient of mine at one time. Is she well—and happy? That is—I mean—"

"Happy? I should think she is! If ever a girl had everything to make her happy, she has!" and just a suspicion of a sigh escaped Jean. "Jack Burnie is the most devoted of husbands, and as for Elizabeth—words fail me!"

The doctor closed the album and handed it back to Jean. Some nerve seemed to tighten suddenly across his brow, a burning ache and strain as if a cord, stretched to a tension of acutest agony tortured his brain, and for a moment only one thought possessed him.

He must go—go quickly—somewhere, anywhere, alone with his aching sorrow and disappointment.

He did not realize until then, how the forlorn hope of yet calling Bessie Grayson his wife had been the controlling factor of his life. The picture of her face with its compelling sweetness, had awakened in his heart all the old pain and longing. And now, she was for ever out of his reach!

Oh, that he might find strength to play the man! She was happy—was it not enough for him to be assured of that? If he really loved her more than himself, should not her happiness be dearer to him than his own?

Thus he reasoned within himself, as with a face

upon which pain and disappointment had set its unmistakable print, he bade his hostess and her guest good-night and passed out into the darkness.

"Well, Helen, you may be able to fathom the mysterious ways of men," observed Jean, with an air of resignation as the door closed on the retreating form of the doctor, "but I must confess in all humility, they are beyond me! Why a glimpse at Elizabeth Burnie's picture should affect the doctor to such a degree of solemnity, I can't imagine! I know for a fact that Elizabeth never cared for any one but Jack Burnie and made no secret of it, so if the doctor's acquaintance dated back several years, he must have known of their engagement—it was published from the housetops."

"I wouldn't notice his sudden change of manner, Jean," advised Helen. "Probably some complicated case in connection with one of his patients came suddenly into his mind and he spoke absent-mindedly. People do that sometimes, you know. Oh!" with a sudden change of voice, "here is Angus! You poor boy! Come over to the fire. I'm sure you're nearly perished. Were you bored to death?"

"Bored! I'm afraid, Helen, you're not alive to the advantages which may be derived from an evening spent in the company of our late caller!—It's most unfortunate for society in general that in the heyday of his youth he failed to turn his attention to the public platform! There's no subject with which he is not conversant, and upon which he cannot speak with authority. His wide

grasp of a question and genius for details, is nothing short of astounding." Notwithstanding, the minister drew a sigh of relief as he leaned forward and warmed his hands at the glowing fire.

"Oh, Angus! if you only heard the awful things he told me to do. As if I would ever dream . . . . " Angus laughed heartily as Helen handed him his belated cocoa.

"Yes, he told me that he had given you a few valuable and timely hints. I fancied I saw my wife carrying out his minute directions with regard to the butcher knife and four dead dogs. I have heard the story in all its sordidness of detail many times. It's no fault of Jim Brett's if we are not prepared in the hour of emergency. By the way, where is Jean, and what have you girls and the doctor been up to?" he inquired cheerfully, as Helen insisted that he drink the cocoa to the very dregs.

"Well, you see, Angus," explained Helen in a low, confidential tone, "Jean was showing the doctor some of her snapshots, and now she is building all sorts of romance round one picture in which he really did appear to show a profound and moving interest."

Jean, entering just in time to catch the closing sentence, brought forth the volume for inspection.

"I know you're not a bit curious, Angus, but I must show you the picture which had such a solemnizing effect upon the doctor, and literally thrust him out into the night."

Opening the book, she displayed the double page.

To the amazement of both girls, the minister's gaze was likewise riveted as he saw before him a speaking likeness of Bessie Grayson.

Too well he understood the sudden change of manner on the part of Dr. Rolston, realizing as he did what a glimpse of the picture would mean to his friend! But he kept the doctor's confidence sacred, nor disclosed the fact that he, too, recognized the sweet face before him.

"Oh, you are looking at the wrong picture, Angus, that is Bessie Grayson—it was Mrs. Jack Burnie's picture on the opposite page in which he was interested," explained Jean, as Angus continued to show an unusual interest in the faces in front of him. "Well, I do declare, my album seems to present more than a passing fascination, first for the doctor and now for mine host. Allow me to remove it to a place of safety—remote from men, as it were—" she quoted whimsically. "Helen, come and persuade your fearless and unconquered Scot that he could never possibly have known either Bessie Grayson or Elizabeth Burnie, unless in a former incarnation."

Angus MacDonald, deciding that this was neither the time nor place for elaboration which involved his friend's confidence kept silent, while greatly he marvelled at the sterility and famine of some men's lives.

To him, there was but one beloved face on earth, and that one was shining down upon him. What

would life mean to him without Helen? Was she looking as well as usual of late, or did he fancy?

Suddenly, she found herself lifted off her feet and borne in the strong arms of her big husband to the near-by couch. Here she was cosily tucked up with all the tenderness of a mother and commanded in no uncertain tone to remain there until such time as her husband granted her permission to rise.

"Well, I think I shall say good-night," announced Jean. "I'm at a loss to account for the extraordinary happenings of the evening. Something has disturbed your worthy husband now, and I thought him as impervious to sudden attacks of sentiment as the Rock of Gibraltar or the statue of John Knox! I'm forced to part with my illusions," she sighed. "It must be the disquieting effect of this rare collection of mine. In future it shall repose in my own room in solemn sanctity."

"Dear Jean," said Helen, as the door closed behind the sweet young girl who was so strangely alone in the world. "I sometimes fancy she is a little lonesome, Angus. We should be careful not to parade our happiness before her, perhaps; I do wish . . . "

But the unspoken wish was smothered in a yawn, and ere long all was quiet in the old manse, which betrayed not the secret that in the spare room, Jean Sinclair, with her head buried in the deep pillows, lay choking back the sobs which shook her girlish form.

"Lonely—just lonely!"

Never would it be hers to win the love and devotion which were poured out at the feet of her girlhood friend. Never!

In the first place she could never inspire it, and besides that, men of Angus MacDonald's calibre were rare—well nigh extinct—she breathed inaudibly, as with closing eyes she wondered if the Rev. John Matheson considered her very young and would he remember to call, as he had suggested, to discuss that subject?

Falling into a light sleep, she dreamed that she had suddenly grown older—so old, that henceforth no man could despise her youth—and incredible as it may appear, the knowledge proved soothing and her slumber became peaceful and unbroken.

Sleep! God-given sleep! "Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care!"

The bright, crisp morning showed no traces of her midnight watch, nor would any suspect Jean Sinclair, so joyous and apparently self-sufficient, of such a moment of weakness.

Chapter XII

THE DRIVE TO BERESFORD

"The world was sad, the garden was a wild
And man, the hermit, sighed, 'till woman smiled."

OWING to the many demands upon the time of Dr. Rolston, whose professional ability was recognized for many miles beyond Bloomfield, several days elapsed before he found an opportunity to claim the fulfilment of Jean Sinclair's promise to drive with him to Beresford.

It was a morning in late November and the haze of Indian summer enveloped the land. Following the strenuous labors of the year Mother Nature was at rest, robed in her most resplendent garments, and seated with folded hands, well pleased with the results of her long-drawn-out toil.

The doctor's face, as he drove up to the manse door, bore the ill-concealed marks of pain and suffering. Since that evening when he had, as he believed, discovered the fact that Bessie Grayson was for ever beyond his reach, he realized how well-nigh unconsciously he had cherished the hope that sometime—somewhere—he might again meet her and tell her of his deep and all-sheltering love.

He half hoped that Jean might speak of her, and yet he knew that for the sake of his own peace

of mind he should endeavor to close the door of his memory against her. Had his undisguised interest in Bessie's picture betrayed him? he wondered. If so, Jean Sinclair gave no evidence of having observed his confusion, as with a face of expectancy she took her seat by his side.

How well the neat, trig, brown suit, and the perky little hat snuggling down over the dark curls, became her! The soft, sable fur cuddled round her slender throat shaded well into the dark, luminous eyes alight with the "lamp of youth." For some reason those eyes were especially luminous on this hazy, November day.

Dr. Rolston decided as he tucked the robe carefully round her, that Jean Sinclair certainly was a girl in a thousand, both as regarded looks and charm of manner.

Why could he not forget the past and win for himself the love of a good woman such as he knew the girl by his side to be? He would be kind to her and considerate, his practice was now well established, his wife would never want for comfort or luxury which it was in his power to provide. He allowed his eyes to rest long and intently upon her face.

Having passed through the village streets, they were already driving along the winding, country road. Jean had been drinking deeply of the beauty of her surroundings, and was apparently miles away in thought when suddenly she turned on the doctor

the searching light of her eyes which seemed to have been gazing far beyond time and space.

Vainly had she been seeking to fathom the hidden mysteries of every-day life—joy and sorrow—life and death—the care-free laughter of childhood and the tremulous prayer of age—love, the compelling force of the universe—love, which plants the remote settler's rude shack to shelter his helpless babes, and lays broad the foundations of the widespread, populous city—love, love of home, of wife, of child.

"God forgive me," breathed the doctor, humbly, "I dare not offer to a woman like Jean Sinclair the burnt-out embers of my love. Nothing but the best that a good man could lay at her feet is worthy of her or will ever satisfy her. I have not that to offer—nor ever will have!" he realized with an aching heart, as Jean's voice called him from the dismal retrospect.

"I wonder, Dr. Rolston, that any one living in this chosen country should ever die! *Why should they?*"

"Why, indeed, Miss Sinclair? May I claim your inference as a compliment to my professional skill?"

"Probably that does account for this being such a long lived community, although to be painfully truthful I hadn't taken it into consideration. What I can't understand is, why people who apparently live such quiet, peaceful lives, with plenty of fresh air and wholesome food, should not keep on the even tenor of their way until they are as old as the patriarchs! Just think what a weight

you would carry in your profession, if you could prescribe out of an experience harking back, say two or three hundred years," and Jean's eyes beamed mischievously.

"I'm afraid your logic leaves something to be desired. In the first place, how could I justify my professional existence were people to live to such an advanced age? A doctor would be a superfluous creation—a sort of fifth wheel."

"Oh, no! Dr. Rolston, I would never dream of implying such a thing. It would be entirely due to your medical skill in diagnosing their minor ailments that they would be enabled to live out the length of their days. You see, there will always be people who adore doctors, or more properly speaking, doctors' medicine! Do not, I implore you, misunderstand me on such a vital point," and the illuminating smile flashed upon him might have well proven disquieting to any other man than himself. "But, do tell me, how far away is Beresford, and whom are we going to visit? I always like to be sure of my objective."

Even as she spoke, the spire of a church appeared over a hilltop, and a few minutes later they drove past the old, stone manse, where, unsuspected, the Rev. John Matheson, who was superintending the covering of his roses for the winter, caught a passing glimpse of the well-known horse and rig, and of the bright, sweet face of the young girl smiling up at the doctor.

A sudden lack of interest in the rosebushes seized

him. Cold fingers clutched at his heartstrings. He turned from the ghost of a garden, and taking up a book on philosophy which he had left upon a near-by bench, returned to his study.

"Adversity's sweet milk—philosophy," he quoted absently.

Strange, that little line from Romeo and Juliet should enter his mind at that instant!

"Adversity?" What reason had he to cry out? He had always enjoyed the study of philosophy—from now on he would delve more deeply into it.

Notwithstanding his noble decision, the book remained unopened upon the study table. Drawing himself up to his full height and pressing a cap down over his unruly, brown hair, John Matheson set out for a rapid tramp in the bracing air, hoping thus to regain his waning interest in philosophy, and to collect the wandering thoughts which would persist in centring round the young girl, who, apparently rejoicing in her youth, and well content, had a short time since passed his lonely door.

"It do beat all, it do, what has got into the minister!" and the faithful James, gardener and sexton, gave the bowl of his time-worn clay pipe a few short knocks on the upturned sole of his boot.

"Here was I, awaitin' to lay down them rose-bushes as he loves like his own flesh and blood—which in the mercy of Providence he has none to worrit him—him helpin' me with the same year in and year out, and just as I was layin' my hand to it, off he goes, and never a word to me, good nor bad!

The missus says he has gone off his vittles somethin' shockin' the last fortnight. If I didn't know the minister to be far above and beyond the like, *I would say there was some woman at the bottom of it all*—I would indeed, which same is at the bottom of every mischief makin', as is gospel truth if you dig down deep enough till you strike the root."

And honest James Gumpsey, silent partner to the housekeeper of the manse, heaved a deep sigh which well nigh "shattered all his bulk," as alone and unaided he laid the rosebushes gently down on Mother Earth's receptive bosom, and covered them tenderly from the winter frost.

Dr. Rolston stopped before a small, brown cottage and the mother of the home came forward to bid him welcome.

Mrs. Wilkins possessed a face upon which refinement and culture were clearly marked. One realized at the moment of coming into her presence that in some unaccountable manner this beautiful soul had escaped its proper worldly setting. Her presence, bearing and appearance would have graced any assemblage.

Jean Sinclair's psychic soul was immediately attracted to her as she was led into the bright front room, where lay the small patient of five short summers.

Little Billy, whose father's ears had early closed to his baby prattle, was lying propped up in a large easy chair with his little leg carefully encased. Billy had jumped out of a hay-mow some time

before to exhibit his acrobatic prowess, and was now "resting from his labors."

"Well, old man, how are you making out?" enquired the doctor cheerfully.

Easy to see that the doctor was a tried and trusted friend, as Billy stretched out his little arms in welcome and pulling him down, implanted a kiss on his forehead.

"Here, here, old boy! This will never do! It's positively embarrassing. You should never cut loose like that in public. Don't you see I have brought a lady to visit you?"

Billy's hand went out to her, shyly. "Pretty lady!" he whispered.

Jean gathered the little, brown fingers tenderly into hers, her face beautiful with that motherly love which is innate in some women.

"You precious darling; does your poor little leg hurt you?"

"Just a little, teeny bit. It's worse in the nighttime, when it doesn't ever seem to come morning. But the doctor is going to take these sticks off soon, aren't you, Doctor?"

"We'll see, Billy. We must be sure to have you on your legs for Christmas. Why Santa Claus may have been packing a pair of skates in his kit, for all we know," suggested the doctor cheerfully, while he gently readjusted the bandages.

"No, Doctor!" and little Billy sighed dismally the pitiable soul cry of babyhood. "Mother says Santa Claus can't bring me any skates this year;

I guess he hasn't been able to make enough pairs to go round. Perhaps . . . "

"Oh, well, who knows? He may have caught up on the job, or taken on an extra hand to help out," said Dr. Rolston, both he and Jean reaching the same decision, that such a darling as Billy would never be overlooked by Santa Claus were it in their power to jog his memory.

Leaving Jean with Mrs. Wilkins and Billy, the doctor went across the street to a near-by drug store to fill out some prescriptions. Barely had the door closed behind him when Mrs. Gumpsey, the estimable woman who presided over the manse, entered the room cumbered with much care and many unwieldy parcels.

"Do sit down, Mrs. Gumpsey," urged Mrs. Wilkins. "It is kind of you to come and see Billy, you have been so good to him."

"Which is no more than I ought to be," she interrupted firmly, "the minister being that took up with the child as nearly lives at the manse, pulling up flowers by the roots to see if they be growin', and playin' horse with the best mahogany chairs, the minister drivin' him up and down the parlor carpet and callin' 'whoa' so loud that I got a start that most laid me on my back with my nerves it did. One night, I do declare, which is more's the shame, him bein' a minister, I saw him with my own eyes, which is gospel truth,"—here her voice lowered perceptibly—"under the parlor table on his knees and him not prayin' neither, but growlin'

for all the world like a bear or wild beast of some sort, and Billy settin' away up on top of a bookshelf —bein' treed, I s'pose, and half scared out of his wits into the bargain.

"I'm a woman as says little, but I do declare I gave the minister a piece of my mind that time, I did indeed. Says I, 'Even if I lose my place for it, it's my plain duty to speak out. Such carryin's on for a man of your age is unseemly, so it is.' says I. 'As would be bad enough if it was your own child, which it ain't nor ever likely to be,'—bein' a vessel set apart, as it were, though I will say a kindlier, likelier man for a husband you would wear the shoes off your feet lookin' for, and not gettin' neither, that you would!"

"Don't mind Gumpins, pretty lady," explained Billy, jealous for his friend. "She's just pretending. She isn't a bit cross, really. You should just go over and get her to give you some ginger cookies—she makes them like cows and horses and everything for me and the minister, and one day she made an elephant with ever so long of a trunk, and all in pink icing—didn't you, Gumpins, dear?" and the little, brown fingers sought the plump, toil-worn hand of John Matheson's housekeeper.

"Hold your peace, child! I do declare since you're took off your feet your tongue is longer than ever!"

"We, I mean the minister and me," resumed Billy, "we plays Noah's ark with the animals. I'm Noah and he is the dove what brings the branch

to Noah—Noah's *me*, you know! You ought to see me, pretty lady, I look just like Noah in my Bible book. Big Chief—that's the minister, he buyed me a false face with long, white whiskers and lends me the long duster out of the buggy. We broke a piece off your plant, Gumpins, for him to carry in his mouth—that was the day before I fell. It had pretty red berries on it,—'cause you see, if the branch had a flower on it, then I'd know I was coming to land, wouldn't I? You didn't mind, did you, Gumpins, dear?"

On account of the flow of eloquence and Billy's reminiscences, Jean was yet to be presented to the garrulous, though great-hearted caller.

"This is Miss Sinclair, Mrs. Gumpsey," said Mrs. Wilkins, who had been detained in the kitchen and had just returned. "Miss Sinclair is a friend of Mrs. MacDonald of Bloomfield manse, and this is Mrs. Gumpsey who looks well after the wants of Mr. Matheson, our minister, and is as good as gold," she added warmly.

"I can well believe it, Mrs. Wilkins," agreed Jean.

"Well, now you are a sweet-looking young lady, to be sure—just a slip of a girl, no more. I do declare I'm took back, I am," sighing heavily, and Mrs. Gumpsey leaned back on the chair which creaked to its undoing. "I heard as how a lady was visiting over Bloomfield way at the manse, and says I to the minister, 'Step over,' says I, 'who knows but she may be the one as has been laid out for you

from the foundations of the earth. Make a call, anyway,' says I, 'not that it is likely to help matters, being as you spend most of your time calling on women folks and never gettin' no further ahead, as any of them would take you for better or worse, providin' they was not already took themselves.'

"Says I, 'Get a good, sensible, settled-down woman—one as knows both the law and the gospel' —by which, you will understand, ma'am, I was pointing to the laws of housekeepin', puttin' it in words as could be sensed by a minister. 'I can't live forever to look after your victuals, and to hold you from maunderin' round the garden in wet socks,' says I, 'more's the pity,' " and she heaved a weighty and reverberating sigh, as a sense of the minister's deplorable condition in case of her demise, was borne in upon her.

Jean, inwardly convulsed, ventured the remark that the minister was a fortunate man in having a woman in his home who looked so well after his worldly needs, with which Mrs. Wilkins heartily agreed.

"Oh, well, I will say I keep his body linen b'iled fresh every week, seein' to it likewise that he don't cast his woollens till the twenty-fourth of May—bein' the day set apart for the same by our blessed Queen Victoria as is dead and gone—and takin' to them again for the Fall Show as comes off the back end of September—no *later*, nor no *earlier*—bein' as there's a time set for all things, which is according to Scripture—the minister himself not bein' able to deny the same!

"Likewise, his victuals are set out before him three times a day, cooked to his likin', though I do say that he don't take the interest in them as would be expected of one whose head is like to hit the top of the door leadin' to the dinin' room, bein' all built to match and not made up of left-overs warmed up, as some stunted men are—which is more's the pity, them not bein' to blame for bein' throwed together out of sich odds and ends as was lyin' round to hand.

"Says I to him this very mornin', 'Set up to your bacon,' says I. 'A man at your time of life needs nourishin'. If you don't eat,' says I, 'you'll grow weak and pasty, and you'll be findin' it hard to get a woman when you *do* make out to lay your mind to it,' although it's gospel truth," she added in a lowered tone of fond conviction, "*it will be a lucky woman as gets him*—which I'm doubtin' if she ever will!"

Mrs. Wilkins sympathies had long been with Jean, who was assisting the small patient to work out a picture puzzle, but she realized it was not in her power to stop the flow of the good woman's eloquence.

"Gumpins! come on over here!" commanded Billy, and putting his arms round her neck, he pulled her down to him. "You don't think I'm going to die, do you?" whispered the small sufferer.

"Die, child! Why, whatever put such nonsense into your head? Die! Not you. There there! let

me see what's in my bag. See! Here is Black Beauty, Ginger, Merrylegs and Beautiful Joe himself, as had his ears cut off, you mind! This is him! I iced him all over to make him forget his troubles! They're fresh made out of my cookie dough this very mornin'," she announced, displaying before the admiring eyes of Billy the proud collection which did credit to her kind, motherly heart, if somewhat lacking in artistic conception and execution.

"Oh! you darling, darling Gumpins!" exclaimed Billy, enthusiastically. "Come here till I kiss you. Why, what is the matter, Gumpins? Here, take my handkerchief," pulling out a little, black rag, which had done duty by his slate. "Am I going to Heaven, do you think, Gumpins?" he whispered."

"The Lord forbid!" answered his devoted friend with sudden vehemence and unwonted fervency, bringing the corner of her apron into requisition to wipe her eyes, which, she explained, were weak and watery at the best of times, and badly needing a steeping of tea-leaves applied night and morning.

"You see, pretty lady, if Santa Claus should happen to bring a pair of skates, I'd want to be here to get them, wouldn't I? Do they skate in Heaven, I wonder?" and the innocent eyes turned to Jean in enquiry.

"You precious child! I don't know. But I'm sure the thing you want to do most of all, you will be able to do there," and Jean believed it, or else

how could she attempt to make straight paths for the little feet which were seeking the way of truth.

"I like you, pretty lady," announced Billy, with childlike candor. "Do you know my Big Chief? He's the minister what plays with me. I'll show him to you as soon as the doctor takes the sticks off. Maybe he'll let you play with us—I'll ask him!"

Mrs. Gumpsey had beaten a rather hasty retreat. She had premonitions, borne out by some wafted aroma, that the potatoes had gone dry, and that the minister's victuals would be ruined. Under the circumstances she felt justified in dispensing with the formality of farewell.

The doctor had been detained much longer than he had anticipated. After promising to come again very soon and see Billy, Jean decided to walk on as far as the clump of evergreens just on the outskirts of the village, leaving word for the doctor to meet her at the turn of the road when his calls were ended.

She walked quickly along the quiet streets, unconscious of the interest her pretty face and graceful carriage had aroused behind divers curtained windows and half-closed doors.

On she went, enjoying to the full the crisp November air which had served to call an added color to her cheeks and brightness to her eyes—past the low-set houses and the village school, where the undying games of tag and leap-frog were in perennial progress—past the general store with its

unmistakable aroma of butter, cheese and dry goods —past the old, stone, ivy-covered church and manse, out into the open fields.

In the near distance rose "The Cedars," beautiful old trees of luxuriant growth, whose sturdy limbs had been racked by many a winter's blast, and whose spreading, hospitable boughs had cradled successions of summer broods.

Surely the doctor was long delayed, decided Jean. Oh well, she would just rest on the big stone under the cedars and await his arrival.

What magnificent trees they were! And the old, flat resting stone, what a tale it could unfold!

She had heard of "sermons in stones,"—not necessarily would they all be sermons, she concluded. How delightfully suited to "talking age and whispering lovers made." But, to neither of these ends did she purpose putting the historic old stone—at least, not at the present time, she decided, determining to continue her walk.

Turning suddenly, she came face to face with the minister of Beresford.

"Why, good morning, Mr. Matheson! I thought I was absolutely alone. Are you an admirer of the old trees, too?" enquired Jean, offering her hand in winsome recognition, as the minister emerged from their shadowy depths.

"Miss Sinclair! I—I did not expect—that is, I——" and John Matheson, who had taken his place on the platform of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and held the

fathers and brethren of the broad Dominion spell-bound as he eloquently poured forth his well-rounded periods, stammered and halted like a school-boy and was at a loss to find a few simple words with which to express himself.

"You don't seem overjoyed to meet me again, Mr. Matheson, I am so sorry"—faltered Jean, and her eyes were those of a little child, chidden for some trifling offence.

"On the contrary, Miss Sinclair, I'm *glad* to meet you again," answered her discomfited friend, partially regaining his power of speech, and Jean, in her heart, doubted not the sincerity of this man of few words.

"You will be wondering why I should be wandering over your parish—'alone, alone, all, all alone,' won't you, Mr. Matheson? Do let me explain. You see, Dr. Rolston brought me over to visit one of his patients, that darling of a little Billy, and as he has been delayed I decided to walk on, which accounts for my waylaying you in this fashion—'bearding the lion in his den,' I might say, as Billy informs me you can roar most as good as the lion in the circus, which I understand he was privileged to hear through your generosity."

"So you've met Billy," laughed Mr. Matheson, having regained to some extent his lost composure. "We are sworn friends. I miss the little chap."

"What a dear he is," exclaimed Jean with enthusiasm. "I have a pressing invitation to come again soon and see him. But that reminds me—in a weak

moment, I think you suggested calling at Bloomfield in the near future. I suppose, owing to the pressure of duties not to mention pleasures, you have overlooked it," and holding her little head proudly as though in censure, Jean assumed an injured air which became her well.

John looked at her earnestly.

"I didn't overlook it, Miss Sinclair," he said gravely. "I—I live a retired life—I hardly dare consider my company acceptable to younger people. I have my people, my books and flowers. I—am a man of quiet tastes," he added, at a loss to express the truth while endeavoring to conceal it.

"One would never have imagined you were such a subdued individual, judging from the words of your estimable housekeeper."

"Then you've met Mrs. Gumpsey—whom to know is a liberal education," and John's boyish laugh rang out, although he was rather fearful as to what revelations regarding his personal affairs had been made to the young girl at his side. "I could wish, at times, that her interest in me were a little less personal and far-reaching. But she's a good soul—though somewhat privileged, I must admit."

"She adores Billy, and who wouldn't? I shall go back again to see him at the very first opportunity. I always hasten to accept an invitation when it is offered in all sincerity."

Poor John! Gladly would he have gone back to Bloomfield ere this had prudence not forbade him!

"Pardon me, Miss Sinclair. Didn't I understand that you were rather prejudiced against ministers? If so, I wouldn't like to impose the presence of one upon you," said John, at a loss for some line of argument.

"How absurd! I'm *not* opposed to ministers, either individually or collectively—anyway, I'm not rooted and grounded in prejudice. Besides, I'm open to conviction! And anyhow, they might improve upon acquaintance! who knows—it is just possible," and Jean glanced up into John's face with an expression which caused him to be seized with a most uncanonical desire to gather up this little bit of sweetness and perversity, and hold it in the security of his great, enfolding arms.

Far from succumbing to this mad impulse, however, he swung far to the opposite side.

"I'm glad you have met Dr. Rolston, Miss Sinclair. He is the 'salt of the earth.' Already, he is a recognized authority in his profession, and—and young," he added, with a sigh. "I trust you may be good friends."

"I'm sure I deeply appreciate your interest on my behalf," answered Jean, turning her dark eyes full upon him. "You are kindness and consideration itself!"

"I don't mean that *I* wouldn't value your friendship, Miss Sinclair. Don't misunderstand me—I would count it a pleasure to be your friend—a great privilege to serve you in any way. You believe it? Say you do!" he added, in a low,

earnest tone, and his eyes were eloquent with unspoken words as he waited for her answer.

"What an extraordinary person you are, Mr. Matheson! I believe you mean what you say and shall immediately put it to the proof," and her voice, losing its bantering tone, sank into almost a whisper. "I wish we *might* be friends. Some time, I would like to tell you what I have never told any one else—that is, just why I appear to be opposed to ministers—that is if I may," she said, with that little, disconcerting note of appeal which set John Matheson's heart pulsating with a foolish joy.

"Good-bye!" she said, offering her hand in farewell. "I will go out the other way and save the doctor the drive over that rough road. Be sure and make a note of our engagement, for I am persuaded you will forget all about it—I believe you've already repented of your generous offer, but I have no intention whatever of releasing you—you shall hear me out to the bitter end."

In a moment she was hastening down the road to meet a man, whom John Matheson recognized as in every way worthy of her—if such could possibly be!

Over and over again, as he walked slowly homeward over the brown road and the fallen leaves, her bright, appealing face rose before his eyes. "I wish we might be friends," she had said, with childlike sincerity.

What madness on his part to let his mind dwell on her, and yet—"there is a pleasure in being mad,

which none but madmen know," and John Matheson enjoyed his temporary insanity to the full, knowing, too well, that reason would ere long be dinning in his ear, and he would awake to things as they were.

"What has come over me?" he asked himself time and again. "I am as weak as any love-sick boy, and God knows," he sighed, "*I am old enough to know better!*"

"How utterly absurd that any one should consider Mr. Matheson old," reflected Jean as she walked quickly along the road to where the doctor's horse was tied. "He looked at me so kindly and indulgently, just as though I were a child. Why will people insist upon considering me young? Eventually, I shall be reduced to wearing a placard:

JEAN SINCLAIR
Spinster
Aged twenty-six years, plus—

"Anyway, I shall try and brush my hair away from my face, but curls are so unruly, they will not stay put," declared Jean with decision, as she seated herself by the doctor's side. He was profuse in his apologies for the unavoidable delay, and made many explanations.

"Don't speak of it, Dr. Rolston. I have been in the very best of company."

"So I observed, Miss Sinclair," taking a second glance at the bright face by his side. "The Rev. John Matheson is one of God's own gentlemen!"

Chapter XIII

THE GIFT

"They all shall wax old as doth a garment."

AT the urgent request of a friend, who lived a day's journey from Bloomfield, Jean Sinclair had consented to leave the hospitable manse for a short time to pay a long-deferred visit.

The minister and his wife decided that an opportune moment had come for them to call upon some of the shut-in members and adherents of the congregation.

There was Mrs. Ezekiel Marah, almost the last survivor of a generation which, possessed of dauntless courage, singleness of purpose and an unswerving devotion to duty, had pushed its way far into the unbroken solitudes, and hewing away "the forest primeval" had laid bare to the golden harvest the broad and fertile fields of our vast Canadian heritage.

Many of these brave and dauntless pioneers subscribed to a stern and implacable theology, which accepted the literal and verbal interpretation of the Scriptures.

The fear of God was ever before their eyes. They conceived him to be an "All-consuming Fire," —God, the All-Terrible—seated in majesty and wrath, breathing forth inexorable decrees. This

was in part due to the hymnology of the time, which abounded in realistic and vivid descriptions of punishment, temporal and eternal.

As the minister and his wife approached Mrs. Marah's dwelling, Angus felt that it devolved upon him to prepare Helen to some extent for any experience through which she might be called upon to pass. Little did he reckon how futile his efforts would prove.

"You will not find our parishioner a particularly cheerful person, Helen. She is inclined to dwell at great length upon her favorite themes—the Unpardonable Sin and Eternal Punishment," volunteered Angus, looking down on his wife to study the effect of his announcement.

"Oh, well, Angus, I'm sure I won't mind anything," she replied, apparently little affected. "It must be very sad to be so old, and have so few friends left," and Helen's voice became tender with compassion. "Perhaps we may be able to brighten her up and turn her thoughts in a more cheerful direction," she suggested, hopefully.

"That would prove a poor consolation, I fear," replied Angus, doubtfully. "Alas! any flickering desire on her part for joy or cheer would but torture her conscience, and sink her deeper in unfathomable gloom lest the world was pressing too close. You can't understand, Helen! For instance, every time I call, she requests me to read her favorite hymn. So strong was the impression it made upon me that it carved itself into my memory!"

"Why, what was it, Angus? Tell me, won't you?"

"I don't know that I should. Its sentiments are far from cheerful! Perhaps I'd better prepare you though, and this hymn best portrays her condition of mind, and her accepted theology. The first verse reads like this;" and in slow and solemn tones he repeated the serious words:

"'And am I only born to die?
And must I suddenly comply
With Nature's stern decree?
What after Death for me remains,
Celestial joys or hellish pains,
Through all eternity?'"

"Awful!" shuddered Helen, as involuntarily she drew nearer the strong, protecting arm of her husband. "Could she have been—was she a very wicked woman, Angus?"

"Wicked? Mrs. Marah wicked? Well, I should say not! She is God's own wheat, threshed and winnowed by suffering and hardship, and just waiting to be garnered into His eternal storehouse. She has not only 'loved her neighbor as herself,' but she has travelled the second mile, she has loved her more than herself. On many a midnight trail she has followed the fitful candle dip through the dense, threatening forest, to call some sister, who had journeyed far down into the valley of the shadow, back to home and husband. Her hands were ever outstretched in loving helpfulness; she is hallowed by service.

"But there," Angus exclaimed, stopping abruptly as he caught the expression of seriousness on his wife's face, "I was so carried away by my theme that I very nearly launched into a sermon, and that would never do, would it, little girl? But here we are, at last! Now, Helen, be brave and prepared for anything!"

A neighbor answered the door and ushered the minister and his wife into a little bedroom furnished with stern simplicity, but clean and spotless to a degree. Its plainness and lack of the superficial provided a proper setting for the little old lady with the clear-cut features and the piercing, far-seeing eyes, who lay propped up in her lofty and formidable feather bed.

Mrs. Marah extended her thin, wasted hand to the minister in dignified welcome, and after gazing into the sweet face of the young wife for a moment, she drew her gently down and kissed her tenderly—a touch which was to Helen as a sacrament.

"*May the Lord preserve thee from the wrath to come:*

"*May the 'arrow that flieth by day,' pass thee by:* but remember, oh, remember, child!" she added, her eyes blazing forth with the light of eternity, "there is,

> "'No room for mirth or trifling here,
> For friendly hope, or worldly cheer,
> E'en now the Judge is at the door,
> And all mankind must soon appear
> Before the inexorable Throne.'"

Helen had bowed her head in deep humility and awe, while the old lady with the other-world expression breathed out upon her benediction and warning to flee eternal punishment.

"Sit down, Mrs. MacDonald, sit down," she urged weakly. "You are pale, child. God grant that when your time comes, be it sooner or later, you may be numbered among the elect. I was raised in a stern school, Mr. MacDonald," she resumed. "The goodness in your young wife's face seems to speak of the love of God; but I must not deceive myself! I am an old woman, and I have my peace to make with God. My one and only concern should be:

"'How ought I then on earth to live,
While God prolongs the kind reprieve,
And props the house of clay;
My sole concern, my single care,
To watch and tremble and prepare
Against the fatal day.
Shall I my everlasting days
With fiends or angels spend?
Nothing is worth a thought beneath
But how may I escape the Death
That never, never dies.'"

Her voice trailed off into a whisper.

Angus glanced at his wife, compassionately, the protective spirit strong within him.

"Mrs. Marah," interrupted he, in a tone of earnest sympathy, as the old lady, exhausted by her

effort, sank back on her pillow. "You know your Bible. It seems out of place on my part to remind a woman of your years and religious experience of 'the love of God which passeth all understanding.' I believe that you will have an abundant entrance—that the doors will open wide to receive you. You have wrought the works of Christ—'*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these . . .*'"

"No, no! Mr. MacDonald," lifting her hands as though to wave away the suggestion, "My 'righteousness is as filthy rags,—filthy rags' . . ." she sighed, as with closed eyes she sank deeper into her pillow.

"But we know it is not in our own righteousness we trust, but through the righteousness of Christ we hope to enter in," continued the minister with loving insistence.

"Even as a 'brand plucked from the burning'," responded Mrs. Marah. "Perhaps—perhaps—God grant it . . ."

Her eyes closed and her voice died away.

For a moment all was still in the quiet room. Then, the tremulous voice once more broke the silence.

"Mr. MacDonald, I asked you to bring your wife that I might look upon her face before I stand facing the Great Tribunal. I have looked—and I am well satisfied."

She paused, and drew a long breath.

"I had a reason—another reason. I have a valued possession . . . which I wish to bestow

with my own hands upon one . . . who will appreciate it . . . I believe your wife will do so, and to her I shall give it. Will you open that lower drawer?" She spoke feebly now . . . "In that far corner . . . to the left . . . there is a parcel. Yes, yes, that is it . . . that fine, white gown."

The minister, rather hesitatingly, and with a sense of sacrilege, drew forth the sacred possession, yellowed with age, and handed it to Mrs. Marah.

It was beautiful in quality, design and workmanship, finely embroidered, pin-tucked and trimmed with exquisite lace. Lovingly she handled it, and passed her poor, withered hand over the finely-sewn tucks.

"Many a weary year has passed away since I laid it by in readiness," she mused, forgetful of her sympathetic hearers. "I made it the winter before Thomas, our first-born, came . . . Oh, but it was the long and cruel winter, and lonely enough in our little, log cabin in the woods, with no neighbors for thirty miles round . . .

"The long, weary nights were the worst, when Ezekiel had to leave me alone while he walked through the woods to bring home the flour on his back . . .

"I was young and fearful in those days, and I barred the door and put cotton in my ears so that I would not hear the wolves howling at the edge of the black forest . . . By the light of the blazing logs in the fire-place I put in stitch after stitch

. . . stitch after stitch . . . fearing lest I might need it when the snowdrops came, if I were to lie out on the little, green mound at the foot of the clearing where the earliest . . . spring . . . flowers bloomed . . . "

During this recital, Angus looked in tender compassion at his wife and his heartstrings tightened.

"I lived though . . . I lived . . . and that is sixty years gone by. Sixty years is a long time . . . Ah, yes . . . a long, long time," she mused. "Thomas, our eldest . . . was the first white child born in the settlement. He has been lying over there, under the twin maples for thirty, long years—yet, he is often with me now, his little . . . feet toddling . . . over the rough-hewn floor . . . of the old log cabin . . . "

She paused, as though to gain strength for the great renunciation.

Lovingly—and lingeringly—she smoothed out the wrinkled creases from the time-worn garment, then folding it in its faded wrapper, she handed it to the minister's wife.

"Take it—take it, Mrs. MacDonald, and wear it . . . and may the blessing of an old woman . . . who thought to have mouldered away in it long ere this . . . go with it. I made it for my shroud, child—*my shroud*, but Thomas' daughter, my grand-daughter, says they are no longer in use . . .

"Ah, well! . . . I have outlived many

fashions and never was one for change myself, but Mary has been a good girl to her grandmother—she is like her father, my first-born—she shall have her will in this . . . " and exhausted by the enormity of her sacrifice, she sank back, once more, upon her pillow.

Poor Helen, rendered well-nigh speechless by the significance of the unwonted gift, could do naught but gasp her thanks. Her husband's psychic soul was quick to grasp the different viewpoints, but he was at a loss to provide Helen with a way of escape, and yet cover the retreat in such a way that Mrs. Marah would never suspect a possibility of any lack of appreciation in accepting so delicate a gift.

Taking the parcel from Helen's limp and unresisting hand, and muttering incoherent words of thanks, he took his wife by the arm; but alas! the time was not yet ripe for their departure—the cup of their discomfiture was not yet full to the overflow. On different occasions, when making his pastoral calls, the minister had suggested prayer and reading of the scriptures. Mrs. Marah invariably preferred that he should read a hymn of her own choosing, which was ever of the same variety and not calculated to produce peace in the breast of one who was nourished on a less stern theology.

"Before you leave, Mr. MacDonald, it would be fitting . . . as my shroud is now passing out . . . that you should read to me a funeral hymn. The book is on the stand—yes, it is yellow

and worn—page fifty-eight . . . " and leaning heavily back on her pillows, she closed her eyes that her spiritual vision might be the clearer.

Glancing at Helen, whose eyes had the hunted expression of a dumb animal, and holding fast in his grip the garment which at its advanced age was to begin life over again in a worldly capacity, he read the first stanza of the hymn:

"'Oh, lovely appearance of Death!
What sight upon earth is so fair?
Not all the gay pageants of earth
Can with a dead body compare.
With solemn delight I survey
The corpse, when the spirit is fled,
In love with the beautiful clay,
And longing to lie in its stead.
What now with my tears I bedew,
Oh, may I this moment become . . . '"

Here the minister paused, the vision of a room-full of healthy, pain-free individuals, joining lustily in this prayer over the cold, silent form of a friend, overcame him.

"Mrs. Marah, pardon me, but is that a sincere prayer: 'longing to lie in their stead'?"

"Yes! but I cannot explain it to you, Mr. MacDonald," she answered, feebly, after some hesitation. "You live in a different age—your 'bottles are bursting with new wine.' I only know . . . that I have heard many a one join in that hymn, who is long since set free from the bondage of sin's sorrow.

. . . The view-point of to-day is different . . . " And her mind seemed again to revert to the past.

"Life was hard . . . the road was rough and toilsome in those days—death and the judgment were very real, very near, just a hand's-breadth away . . . Life is . . . easier, now —and—and religion . . . " she sighed—"but don't make the way . . . too broad . . . *narrow, narrow* is the road . . . "

Her voice died away, and Angus, looking at her, realized that her mind was no longer concerned with the present—her eyes were gazing far beyond the grave, as though she might descry some long-lost, familiar face.

Quietly, he and his wife slipped out into the beautiful sunshine of God's blessed world, and marvelled greatly how any one could ever doubt the eternal love of the Creator.

"Oh, Angus! Angus! was ever any one before called upon to accept such a gruesome gift? I can't touch it!" shuddered Helen. "Oh, why did she give it to me? Is it wicked of me not to appreciate it?"

"You poor, little girl! It was hard on you, but I never was so proud of my wife before, and that's saying a good deal."

No one observing the blending of love and admiration in the husband's face, would be inclined to doubt his sincerity.

"You would not be so proud of me, Angus, if you only knew how wicked and rebellious I feel inside.

Of course, I could never dream of hurting the poor, dear old lady's feelings by not accepting it, but Angus, what a very—how can I possibly describe her?—a very *depressing* person she is! Supposing after all, she should be right, and we do not think enough of our sins? Perhaps we don't think sufficiently of the place where 'the worm dieth not.' Perhaps it is *wrong* to be happy!"

"See here," replied Angus. "Where is my bright little wife? To me, there is more true religion in that dimpled smile of yours than in all the Misereres of the Capuchins."

"You are such a comfortable person, Angus! But there is one thing certain," she added, with sudden determination. "Never! *never!* will I wear that gown—it would render the night hideous, nothing will ever induce me to put it on—*nothing!* I would do nearly anything for my husband or for his people, but I have my limitations!"

Relieved from the strain of the last hour, and moved by his wife's vehemence, the minister cast about for a plan to ease the situation.

"Helen," he assured her, "You shall be spared further torture. We will afford it a decent burial. Every respect due to age shall be shown it for it certainly was time-honored, and a 'vessel set apart,' but, for the time being I shall guard it carefully in my study under lock and key."

"Angus, you don't believe in omens, do you? No, of course you don't—you are far too good and sensible. But listen," and Helen's voice sank to a

whisper, "when Mrs. Marah handed me that—that *shroud*, I felt as though some stranger were tracking over my snow-covered grave," and the hunted expression on the young wife's face was pitiable to behold.

"Helen, dear," and her husband held her in his tightening grip as he gazed into her eyes, great with hidden fear, "forgive me for taking you there to-day! Don't, don't, look like that, Helen! My wife! *God is good!*"

"Angus, would you very much mind not taking that gown into the manse at all? I'm ashamed of my weakness, but I can't help it! I *do* appreciate the gift," she continued, brokenly, "and the spirit in which it was given to me. I fear I'm very unworthy of it—but Angus—if we could do something with it for the present—perhaps . . . "

"If you don't wish it to enter the manse, enter the manse *it shall not!*" announced Angus, with grim determination. "Here shall it lie—and here shall be its burial place." Entering alone, into the deep wood, where the thick evergreens threw dark, funereal shadows, he lifted aside the root of a fallen tree, and pressing aside the loose earth, he laid away the offending garment, tenderly.

His feelings were those of mingled reverence and compassion, as his thoughts reverted to the little, old-world lady whose winding sheet it was to have proven, and who, unknown to the minister and his wife, had already passed from earth's shadows into the eternal sunshine of the presence of God.

Chapter XIV

BESSIE GRAYSON

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast."

THE days grew shorter, gloomier and colder, and the chilly nip of winter began to make itself felt in real earnest.

Jean Sinclair, returning unexpectedly from her visit, found the Bloomfield manse deserted save for the small maid-of-all-work, who volunteered the information that "the minister and his missis had gone to see some ailin' folks, and she didn't know if they'd get home afore supper or not!"

Jean decided to relax, mentally and physically. She would spend a quiet, peaceful afternoon by the cheerful, crackling logs in the inviting living-room, feeling sure that no sane person would be abroad upon such a raw, forbidding day, unless by stern force of necessity.

Thus safe from intrusion, she would seize the opportunity to array herself in a soft, pink silk negligé gown, the gift of an indulgent and luxury-loving aunt. It certainly was most becoming to her, and the little, crystal beaded, pink slippers peeping out from under its silken folds, provided the last touch to a costume, which indeed "became her better than she knew."

Notwithstanding the established fact that the knowledge of being well and becomingly gowned is productive of great serenity of mind, and tranquility of spirit, Jean Sinclair was restless and unsettled to a degree.

She sank luxuriously into the great, inviting chair with its welcoming, outstretched arms, her slippered feet stretched out to the kindly warmth of the glowing hearth. Opening a volume of Dickens, she essayed to read, but her interest flagged, the humor conveyed in the turn of a word escaped her keen appreciation. The sorrows and trials of the immortalized characters melted her soul to tears.

From out the window she caught a glimpse of the cold, blue hills in the near distance. An occasional gust of wind scuttled by, carrying the dead leaves of summer in its wake. Now and then, a snowflake was gently wafted to earth, bearing on its white bosom winter's chill message.

"This will never do—*never!*" exclaimed Jean with sudden determination as she closed the book with decision. "I am dull—positively *dull*—'steeped in melancholy'—I, Jean Sinclair, who ever possessed a great appreciation of my own society! Only *small souls* are lonesome—*great souls* fall back upon themselves, and find comfort and consolation through their own profound meditations," philosophised Jean, as she gave the fire an aimless poke.

"While it is just possible that I might not be considered a great soul, I will admit, that heretofore, when thrown upon my own resources, I've never

been at a loss to employ my time pleasantly, and I venture to hope, profitably," she reflected, with a suppressed yawn.

"I do wonder," she mused, "if Mr. Matheson will remember his promise to call. What a distinguished appearance he has! And such a good face—how utterly absurd that any one should consider him old!

"How happy Helen is," she sighed. "I am so glad for her sake," and Jean gazed dreamily at the flickering firelight in the grate. Noticing two smoking logs which had become separated, and which for lack of close companionship were emitting neither light nor warmth, she took the fire-tongs and placed them carefully side by side. Immediately, the room was filled with brightness and cheer as they blazed up happily. "You see, they were lonesome—*just lonesome!*" reflected Jean, fancifully, as she watched the bright flames mount higher and higher, rejoicing in their new-found comradeship.

"I believe," she added, after some reflection—"in fact I am persuaded, that I should feel much easier in my mind, were I to have a nice long talk with Mr. Matheson and explain some things to him. You see, I'm afraid that he doesn't like me very well—not that it really matters, but it's a new experience for me, possibly a wholesome one, who knows!—for strange to say, 'unworthy though I be,' people generally *like* me. At all events, they don't display any open antagonism—not that Mr. Matheson does either—not at all! He's far too kind and

good to be capable of that sort of feeling—for any one."

Lost in reverie, she failed to notice that some one had entered through the back parlor door, which opened out on to a wide side verandah.

"A thousand pardons, Miss Sinclair," apologized Dr. Rolston, as he espied the lonely little figure in the clinging, pink gown, half buried in the depths of the big arm chair. "I am more than sorry for disturbing you in this fashion," he said, as he took her hand, with unmistakable pleasure reflected in his gaze. "I was not aware you had returned. I just ran in to find a book which Mr. MacDonald had left for me . . . "

"Oh, please don't mention disturbing me, Dr. Rolston. The one thing I desire at present above all others, is to be *disturbed*—'I little reck, how.'"

"'Or by whom,' shall I add, by way of finishing the quotation?" queried the doctor, noting her changing play of expression.

"Oh, not by any means! Desperate as is my condition, I am not prepared to go that far. Don't for a moment think me lacking in hospitality—or discrimination," protested Jean, with regained vivacity, "but you see, I hardly expected callers to-day, and arrayed myself accordingly, and—and with an eye to comfort," she admitted, with some confusion.

"Well, may I hope that my call will not interfere seriously with your comfort?" and his eyes twinkled merrily.

"Oh, not at all! How rude you must think me! I'm sorry Mr. and Mrs. MacDonald are not here, but do sit down and talk to me, won't you? Your patients can wait—possibly your absence may provide them with an added reprieve, a new lease of life, as it were," and Jean laughed merrily as the doctor, nothing loth, seated himself at her bidding, on the opposite side of the blazing, open hearth.

"I'm afraid," he said, "you haven't a proper appreciation of my professional ability."

"That certainly is through no fault on the part of your patients," answered Jean, emphatically, "they are eloquent in your praise. I heard an ardent admirer tell Mr. MacDonald, that 'Dr. Rolston could mix up medicines so strong and powerful, that they would raise up a man with one foot in the grave, causing him to leap with joy.' In fact, I was assured that your patients invariably recovered, unless called upon in the will of Providence to die *natural* deaths!"

The doctor laughed heartily as Jean explained that she hardly grasped the meaning of the latter statement, and would feel greatly privileged if he, with his professional knowledge, would explain the connection of cause and effect! It certainly was a matter of vital importance to those most concerned.

"I'm afraid that I'm far from infallible," he answered, and his face assumed a serious expression. "We medical men use our professional knowledge, merely as a means to an end."

"And I suppose in some cases the *end* comes more

quickly than in others," suggested Jean, glancing mischievously at the doctor.

"I see you are determined to underestimate me, Miss Sinclair, and as modesty is my conspicuous virtue, I am unable to defend myself," affirmed he, with affected humility.

"Seriously, Dr. Rolston," and there was no mistaking the sincerity of her tone, "if I were afflicted with some mysterious malady, the symptoms of which you considered it beyond your power to diagnose, I should go no further afield for professional assistance or consultation, but in Biblical phraseology, I would just 'gather up my feet and get me hence,' in other words, give up all hope!" and Jean's eyes were turned in full assurance on the doctor.

"Thank you, Miss Sinclair. I believe you, and shall try to be worthy of your confidence as far as lies in my power. The medical profession is a noble one—as you know, it is within its power to do a great preventive work, particularly among children. The body exerts a strong and compelling influence over the mind, and health, to a large extent ensures happiness and deadens grief, for 'some griefs are med'cinable,'—not all—not all! However, we must try to keep up a brave front and cloak our disappointments as best we may."

Jean had a distinct realization that the doctor, though present in body, was far and beyond absent in spirit, nor would she venture to intrude upon the privacy of his soul.

The fire burned low, and a few early snowflakes stamped their fleeting whiteness on the window pane.

Jean's low voice broke the silence.

"When you spoke of being brave for the sake of others, you reminded me so much of a very dear friend of mine. You won't mind if I tell you about her, will you? For some reason I've been thinking of her all day."

"I'd be greatly interested."

Jean's voice grew tender with reminiscence.

"We were children together, and together mothered our dolls and played at mud pies. My father, as you perhaps know, was the minister of the village, and my friend's father was a wealthy mill owner, who heaped upon his only daughter every luxury. As we grew older, we laid our dolls, or more properly speaking, their remains, aside in my old cradle in the manse attic, pinned up our hair and my father tutored me at home, while Betty left the village to attend a very exclusive, near-by school for young ladies. We spent our holidays together and although Betty was an only child whose every wish and more had been gratified, it made no difference, she remained the same, thoughtful of others, sweet and unspoiled.

"Her father died before she reached womanhood, and her mother, always frail, did not long survive the shock. Betty was a most devoted daughter. She accompanied her mother to place after place, in the vain attempt to regain a measure of health

and strength. But the doctors gave little hope of ultimate recovery, and Betty was soon left alone in the world."

Here Jean paused and choked down the feeling which was fast threatening to interfere with her story.

"To the great surprise of everyone—Betty herself included—it was discovered that her mother, prior to her death, had sustained heavy financial losses, and her daughter was rendered practically penniless. I spent the last night with Betty in the beautiful, spacious home—no longer hers.

"There were no murmurings nor complainings, she had decided to devote her life to nursing, had applied to a well-known hospital and was accepted for trial duty. She seemed perfectly happy. 'Why should I rail against fate, just because I am poor?' she said. 'Already, fate has been very kind to me, and provided me with a means of serving others. Perhaps—some time—'a poor man, helped by me, shall make me rich,' with the riches 'that do not take unto themselves wings.' Her very words impressed themselves upon my memory," added Jean, as her thoughts continued to dwell lovingly upon her absent friend.

"I shall always consider that one of the greatest privileges of my life was to have known Bessie Grayson. I would like you to meet one another, Dr. Rolston," and Jean's voice rang true as she turned her face towards him, her eyes glowing with

love and appreciation for the brave girl, who in her cross had discovered her crown.

"Bessie Grayson, did you say, Miss Sinclair? Not Bessie Grayson! Why, she is married—you showed me her picture one night. I—I remember well," added the doctor, his face pale with suppressed emotion. "I hadn't heard it before you told me."

"Married! Bessie Grayson married! Why, Dr. Rolston, I never told you that. It's a fabric of your own imagination, surely! How could you have possibly gathered that from anything I told you, I wonder." She considered. "Oh, now I know! You must have been looking at the wrong picture. There are two on that page—the other was Elizabeth Burnie—that explains it. How ridiculous of me! I am . . . "

"Not married! Bessie Grayson not married, did you say?" and the doctor rose to his full height. "Do not play with me, Miss Sinclair . . . " and his eyes, bright with a vision of hope renewed, commanded the truth.

"Oh, Dr. Rolston, do forgive me," implored Jean. "No! no! Bessie is not married—I did not know—" she faltered, and rising she placed her hand in sympathy upon the doctor's arm. "I'm so sorry to have hurt you, and—and made you feel so badly—I never dreamed—I—" and Jean broke off in tearful, speechless confusion.

"It is I who should ask forgiveness," replied he, with ill-concealed emotion, as he struggled to regain

his composure. "You have given me fresh hope today. I thought Bessie Grayson was for ever beyond my reach," he added, as with his heart in his eyes, he took the little hand in his and gazed down into the sympathetic face of Bessie Grayson's childhood friend.

In a moment the doctor was gone.

Eager to be alone with his new-found hope, he slipped quietly out by the side door as John Matheson, who had been admitted to the hall, and who had caught a fleeting glance of their parting, came forward to where Jean stood, her beautiful face still alight with reflected happiness.

Chapter XV

THE REV. JOHN MATHESON

"A combination and a form indeed
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man."

THE Rev. John Matheson had been a frequent visitor at Bloomfield manse before the arrival of Jean Sinclair.

He had helped Angus MacDonald with many a problem, spiritual and ethical. The fact that in his own field he had succeeded in educating the people along broader social and religious lines, proved to be great encouragement to Angus. This was particularly so at times when some opinionated and outspoken individual, with a vision enclosed by his own back fence, would fain block his schemes for the uplift of his people and the betterment of the community.

As he turned his footsteps towards Bloomfield on that dull, November afternoon, his reason dare not admit that which his heart realized—the desire to see once more the bright, alluring face of Jean Sinclair speeded him on his way.

There could be no possible danger now, he persuaded himself—now that she belonged to another!

"It's better so—more fitting in every way!" he argued to himself, his heart beating unsteadily as he looked down upon the dainty little figure in the soft, pink folds, and caught the light of unmistakable welcome in the dark, wistful eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Matheson, I'm so glad to see you! How lovely of you to come! I hope you won't feel called upon to go when I tell you that Angus and Helen are out. Do sit down and talk to me, won't you?" and she piled the cushions comfortably in the deep hearth chair for him. "This is a most opportune visit—for, of course, it's going to be a visit, isn't it?" she enquired, with a smile which seemed to deprive John Matheson of all power to make a suitable reply. "Did you have a premonition that I might need you—that is, that I might need a minister?"

"I can't say that I did, Miss Sinclair, and—pardon me—there's something I should tell you," speaking with difficulty and evident emotion—"please forgive me for—for having been an enforced observer of your farewell with Dr. Rolston."

"Oh, is that all?" exclaimed Jean, much relieved. "Why you are not in the least to blame. Susanna has a way of ushering in people *sans ceremonie.* I don't mind it at all. You see, personally, I have nothing to hide," she continued, not dreaming how the attitude and expression of that farewell might be misinterpreted.

"Dr. Rolston is a fine man. Any woman's

happiness would be safe in his keeping," replied John Matheson, who, cost what it would, was determined to shoulder his cross.

"I think I've heard you extol the doctor before, on several different occasions in fact, and I heartily agree with you—but, you see, with the best intentions in the world, it would be quite impossible for him to make more than one woman happy at a time—well-meaning and estimable though he be," explained Jean, a little piqued over John Matheson's apparent willingness to hand over the keeping of womankind in general, and of herself in particular, to Dr. Rolston's keeping.

John Matheson's honest soul was at a loss to account for Jean's evident lack of interest in the man who had so lately left her presence. However, he would be true at all costs, true to the doctor, true to Jean Sinclair and true to himself. She wished to tell him something—it was clearly his duty to stay and hear it. Duty was duty, take what form it would, he argued bravely.

"If I can be of any service to you, Miss Sinclair, I shall be only too glad to stay," and no one could doubt the truth and sincerity which shone forth from the depths of John Matheson's deep, searching eyes, as he fixed them steadily upon the sweet, upturned face of Jean Sinclair.

"I believe you mean it, Mr. Matheson—that is why I—I value your friendship, and I think—yes, I think I may say, your kindly interest in me, may

I not?" she asked, with childlike confidence. "Yes, I know I can!" as a look of perfect confidence passed between them.

"Now, move your chair nearer the fire, and please don't keep your eyes fastened on the window as though you're anxious to go. You see, I can talk so much more to the point if you'll look at me occasionally. Yes, thank you, that is much better—Of course I didn't mean that you had to rivet your eyes upon me—that—that certainly, might be very wearing upon you—just an occasional glance by way of showing an interest, would be quite all the most exacting might hope for," and she gave him a little, playful smile, that lifted up the corners of her mouth and brought into play two merry little dimples.

John smiled too, but his face was pale, and he was absorbed in the problem of how to subdue his emotions. Her bewitching, childlike manner—half mischievous and half entreating, was making sad havoc of his self-possession.

"There now! that's better! you look so much more cheerful and resigned to the inevitable."

His eyes caught and reflected her smile.

"You see, Mr. Matheson, just before Susanna showed you in, Dr. Rolston had been telling me something very, *very* important—at least, he didn't tell me in so many words, but I read his secret. It was a great surprise to me, but a most pleasant one. Maybe some time I will tell you all about it," she volunteered, in a low, confidential tone.

"I understand, Miss Sinclair. It—it isn't altogether a surprise to me," and John Matheson took a tight grip of himself, and turned his gaze away from the sweet eyes wherein he so plainly read happiness. How was he to know that it was the reflected happiness of an absent friend, which had kindled their tender depths.

"Now, Mr. Matheson, do make yourself comfortable and at home, and would you very much mind not looking so—so caged, for you see you will be quite at liberty to depart when you hear my tale out to the bitter end, *but not a moment before.* Possibly, though, I should warn you that I'm in a reminiscent mood, and inclined to be garrulous," explained Jean conscientiously, noticing the minister's discomfiture, but at a loss to account for it.

"I am sorry you find me such poor company," he replied with quiet patience. "I assure you I shall be deeply interested in whatever you wish to tell me. I—"

"Yes! Yes! I know you will! You are always so kind and sympathetic to everyone. You see, I don't blame you for not appreciating to the full all my fine points, since you're under the impression that I don't like ministers—either in general or particular! Now, I really want to correct that error," she continued with emphasis, "It's altogether too broad and far-reaching in its conception, and besides, *it's not true!* I know I was not particularly enthusiastic over Helen marrying a

minister, not that I didn't like Angus MacDonald, but because I had a personal, inside knowledge of ministerial life.

"As you know, I'm the daughter of a manse," and Jean's eyes grew dark and wistful. "I have one brother—he's practising law in a western city. It was my father's prayer that he might have devoted his life to the ministry, and at one time it was my brother's intention to do so. I needn't dwell on the fact that my father was a good man—one who feared God, and loved and served his fellow man. But perhaps—*possibly*—his daily life was more eloquent than his preaching.

"I didn't understand then, nor do I now, why people should enter the House of God for any other purpose than to worship God—to hear His truth read, and to pray. I firmly believe that there never was a sermon preached by a man who was possessed of an honest desire for the cure of souls, but the blessing of God rested upon his feeble utterances, and it proved to be food for some hungry soul. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Matheson?" and Jean's eyes scanned his face in earnest enquiry.

"I do, Miss Sinclair," replied John Matheson, gravely, the tone of his voice carrying conviction. "If we could but make the people realize that the church is the House of God; that God is in His Temple, and that it is their duty to go there to worship Him, it would place a heavy responsibility upon those who absent themselves from the church, and

fail to come before his presence. All ministers of the gospel would be honored as God's anointed, and the people would hesitate to criticize the manner in which the Bread of Life was broken unto them—their one anxiety being, lest *through not partaking of it*, their souls be starved to all eternity.

"Forgive me," he continued more quietly, "I'm a man of few words and seldom express myself so freely, but you have brought this homily down, yourself, upon your defenceless head," and he smiled gravely into the upturned, serious face. "I have interrupted you, you were speaking of your father," he added gently.

After a short silence, during which Jean's thoughts were busy with the days long past and gone, she continued the story of her father's ministry.

"As my father approached middle life or slightly beyond he decided that a change in pastorate would be advisable. There were in the congregation a few whose duty and calling in this world appeared to be that of keeping the minister in a frame of mind to appreciate the prospect of a heavenly country—'where the wicked cease from troubling.'

"Poor old dad! Many a long, weary night he tossed on his sleepless pillow, because old Jacob Hardstone, being disappointed at not having been elected to the eldership, and going about to establish his own righteousness, so to speak, displayed his fitness for the high calling of an elder by indulging in carping criticism of the minister and his people.

"Mr. Matheson," faltered Jean, "do not mind if I am *very, very* much in earnest."

Her eyes dropped, but not before he had seen the tear which she hastily brushed aside.

"Well, at all events," she resumed, bravely, "the end of it all was that my father was rendered uncomfortable and his work interfered with to such an extent that he decided to preach for a call.

"To a man of my father's proud spirit, and retiring disposition, this experience was trying and humiliating to a degree. I remember how difficult he found it to secure vacancies in which to preach—how, when the opportunity came, his Prince Albert coat, which had begun to bear eloquent testimony to a long life of constant usefulness, was brushed, pressed and renovated, in the vain hope of restoring its long-lost youth! In solemn conclave, mother and I decided that his time-worn shoes must be replaced by new ones, for fear the honest patches might be too prominent and the people fail to recognize the fact that such outward trappings count for nothing when the feet are already shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace.

"How I longed to be earning money, that I might help eke out dad's stipend, for it was always his great desire that my brother Jack should enter theology in the fall, and we would all require to sacrifice for his education.

"Am I tiring you, Mr. Matheson?" and Jean lifted her sorrow-laden eyes to his in enquiry.

"No! No! Miss Sinclair. I am deeply interested," answered John, his great heart throbbing with sympathy and understanding.

"Well, dad went," quietly resumed Jean. "He had barely passed the prime of life, but for some reason others were preferred before him. Conditions grew more and more uncomfortable in my father's charge—so much so, that he realized he could no longer serve the congregation faithfully as its minister.

"There remained one vacancy in which he had not preached. There seemed little likelihood of him receiving the call as many good and able men had preceded him. However, he would go and deliver his message.

"Oh, the bitterness and cruelty of it all! Dear old dad! whose whole *life* was a sermon—read and known of all men!" and turning away her face, she choked back a sob which wrung the heart of honest John Matheson.

"I am sorry, Mr. Matheson, to have so little control over myself," she said bravely, but with quivering voice. "I don't know why I am telling you—I have never spoken of it before—but somehow, you seem to care!"

"You are right," answered John quietly, and with deep emotion, fixing his eyes steadily upon her,—"you are right, I *do* care. God help me!" he breathed, but he realized that already Jean's thoughts were far distant.

"There is little more to tell," she continued. "Dad went, and although worn out with anxiety and disappointment, those who were present at that morning service will long remember it. They were brought very near to the Gate of Heaven."

A log which had been burning brightly with a steady glow, suddenly fell apart.

"He did not come back," Jean went on quietly. "He received a call—from the Great High Priest—to serve in a 'Temple not made with hands, Eternal in the Heavens'!"

Silence ensued, broken but by the sough of the wintry wind as it moaned through the leafless maples.

John Matheson's sympathetic nature was stirred to its utmost depths, but he found himself powerless to alleviate the sorrow of the young girl who had bared her soul to him in trustful confidence.

"That is nearly all, Mr. Matheson," and she bravely raised her eyes to his. "They laid dad away in the old churchyard and mother soon followed him. Jack did not enter the ministry. Doubtless, dad's experience influenced him to some extent. It may be that he did not feel he was the stuff of which martyrs were made; possibly his idea of justice and fair play entered into his decision. I don't say he was right, but I *will* say that Jack is a good man who would have served the Church well and to the best of his no mean ability had he decided otherwise," and Jean sighed deeply. "I visited their resting

place this summer. It is lovingly tended by members of the old congregation, many of whom my father held in his arms at baptism.

"And now," continued Jean, after a long pause, during which John Matheson had vainly cast about in his mind for some means of expressing his deep and heartfelt sympathy, "my story is done. You know now why I am not supposed to care for ministers—which really is not true at all. But then, you will understand—you always do, I feel sure you do, that is why your people like you so much," and her expression of childlike confidence in him, was hard to endure unmoved.

"No! no! Miss Sinclair, do not overrate me. I have so many failings, but believe me, I do understand and sympathize. The fact that you have considered me worthy of your confidence means more to me than I can ever tell you. I hope," he added, holding himself under control with the whole strength of his being, "I hope that you will find great happiness, which may atone to some extent for what you have suffered. Forgive me if I appear to intrude—but I am your friend, you believe that, don't you?"—enquired John, his voice tense and lowered to a whisper.

Jean colored a little and her eyes fell as she answered, "Yes, Mr. Matheson, I could never doubt it."

"I wanted to say," hesitated John, taking a tight grip of himself, "that—that I feel your happiness

will be safe in the keeping of Dr. Rolston. I have every . . . "

"Why, Mr. Matheson! What can you possibly mean?" interrupted Jean, indignantly, and her great, dark eyes met his with wonder and reproach, "why will you insist in giving me to Dr. Rolston? If I didn't believe in you, I would be very—*very* angry! I believe I *am* angry, anyway!" she added, her little head tilted proudly as she wilfully turned her face towards the window.

"Oh no! Miss Sinclair—not that!" interrupted John, quickly, his eyes resting on her more tenderly than he knew. "Don't misunderstand me. I—I am deeply interested in your happiness. Believe me, that is my only motive—"

"Mr. Matheson," cried Jean, with a sudden flash of understanding, "can it be possible? Oh, I am so sorry! You must have misunderstood! I could explain everything, but I would rather not—it wouldn't be fair—not yet!"

"Miss Sinclair!" interposed John, his eyes commanding the truth, "tell me, am I to wish you happiness?"

"To wish me happiness? Why, certainly you are. Just keep on wishing it as hard as ever you can—I'll need it! You see, I have a premonition that I was ordained a spinster from the foundations of the earth, and so will require your sympathy and good wishes, which are free to all, I believe, isn't that so?" and the half mischievous, half entreating

glance flashed upon John, caused him instinctively to rise to his feet.

He would go—he must go, *forthwith*, and stand not upon the order of his going—anywhere—away from the sweet, compelling presence of the young girl to whose sad story he had just listened.

Before he could carry his decision into effect, Angus and Helen entered the wide hall, and through the open folding-doors espied the unexpected occupants of the fire-lit, rose-shaded room.

"Why, Jean Sinclair! I never dreamed you were coming back to-day or I certainly wouldn't have gone out with Angus. I'm so sorry," apologized Helen, as she warmly welcomed her friend. "And Mr. Matheson! How fortunate that you should have called to keep her company. We are always so glad to see you at Bloomfield manse. Oh, you're not going to hurry away just as we have come home, surely."

"Sit down, John," urged Angus hospitably, "and let us have an old-time chat while the girls compare notes awhile. I have some new books on modern thought that I'd like you to look over. By the way, we have put through that library scheme and formed a dramatic society. We intend putting on some good, wholesome plays this winter, I want to talk things over with you. What's your hurry?"

"Yes, do stay, Mr. Matheson. Angus is so interested in what you have done at Beresford. Take that comfortable chair by the bookshelf," urged

Helen. "I do hope Jean has been nice to you, and hasn't been making you believe that she is opposed to ministers. You see, her view-point is quite different since coming here. To prove that her conversion is not only a passing phase, we are going to take her over with us to your manse, some day—that is, of course, if you will give us a pressing invitation," suggested Helen, by way of removing all obstacles.

"When Helen decrees, submit to the inevitable, John! I have long since ceased to act upon my own initiative," observed Angus laughingly, as taking his wife's wraps, he placed her tenderly in the most comfortable chair before the crackling pine knots.

"Possibly Mr. Matheson doesn't wish for callers. He may be very discriminating, and not be disposed to receive guests for the purpose of advancing their education along the lines you suggest," interposed Jean, as with face averted, she busied herself over the teacups.

"You will be a most welcome guest under my roof, Miss Sinclair. I shall count it a great honor to entertain Mrs. MacDonald and yourself, not to mention Angus, of whom I've seen very little since he's found Bloomfield manse so inviting," and John congratulated himself upon having regained his self-possession. Never again would he permit his grip to relax.

"Oh well, cheer up John! Of course there will never be another wife like mine, but there are numbers of good women who would adorn Beresford

manse. *Concentrate*—just *concentrate*, old man," advised Angus, with a *veni-vidi-vici* expression of countenance, as his eyes rested upon his wife's fair face.

"Perhaps Mr. Matheson is well content with his lot, so why attempt to stir up his nest, even by suggestion?" expostulated Jean, her face aglow.

"Well, you see, Jean, that's the only way to teach the young eagle how to fly," knowingly responded Angus, as John moved towards the door. "So you must go! Well, I'm sorry, but sick calls are imperative. I'll see you off the premises, providing you promise to come back, soon."

"Yes, indeed. Be sure to come back *very* soon. You know you're always welcome," added Helen.

"Thank you, Mrs. MacDonald, I will accept your invitation very gladly. Good-bye, Miss Sinclair, good-bye for the present. I shall look forward to your visit," he added quietly.

And John Matheson was gone.

The stiff, bracing air sobered him to some extent, but his heart was torn with conflicting emotions.

None other had entered her life—she had told him so, but how dare he—knowing what he did of her life-story, try to win her for his wife—the wife of a minister!

What suffering he had read in the deep, dark eyes! How he had longed to take the little, quivering form into his strong embrace, and defy the world to do its worst. He—*he, John Matheson*, a man of mature

years, his temples already lightly sprinkled with grey! No! no! he must fight against such temptation with the whole strength of his manhood—he must not allow this, this obsession to hold dominion over him. Truly, "whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad!" he quoted with dreary emphasis, as he decided to bar the door of his heart and shut out the memory of the appealing face, which was ever before his vision.

"Well, so you're home at last, Mr. Matheson," exclaimed the ever-watchful Mrs. Gumpsey, hovering over him as he removed his rubbers and hung his greatcoat in the hall.

"It's no time of night for a man of your years, as ought to consider his age and not be staying off his vittles, visitin' folks, like as not, as is well enough to set up to their three meals a day. You should be keepin' out of the night air as is well knowed to be loaded with rickets and jaundice, not to mention rheumatiz. As I said to Gumpsey, (not that he can hear anything short of a steam whistle) says I, 'the minister needs a woman of his own in his declinin' years, that he do.' Gumpsey noddin' his head for all the world as if he had something in it, which is well known to the lawful wife of his bosom *as he hasn't.*"

"Have there been calls for me, Mrs. Gumpsey?" interjected the minister with quiet patience, in a vain attempt to stem the worthy woman's verbosity, the best he could hope for being but to direct it into another channel.

"Calls? That there has! I do declare, I was that took back," and overcome by the memory, she collapsed into a near-by chair which creaked audibly. "'Tis gospel truth, one never knows what a day, nor night, neither, for that matter'll bring forth," and she settled herself back with folded arms and an air of being resigned to the inevitable.

"This very day as I was settin' peeling the potatoes, and ponderin' over the ways of Providence which gives a man a woman as opens her mouth with wisdom, and then closes his ears so tight she can't get nothin' into them—who should I see comin' slow up the manse steps but Jane Softly whose man was took a matter of two-years ago—I think I told you about her she was—"

"Yes, yes! you did!" hurriedly interrupted John Matheson, fearful of further details.

"Well, Jane was left with two children under three on her hands, her workin' hard ever since to keep a roof over their heads and a bit in their mouths. Says she to me, 'Is the minister in, Mrs. Gumpsey?' 'No!' says I, 'more's the pity. What with ailin' folks, and folks as think themselves ailin' and ain't, he is wore off his feet. Not that you ever hear him complainin'—not him. But, what can *you* want with the minister?' says I sympathetic like, for none knowed better than me what Jane has gone through. Not that her man was much loss, only a *man* is a *man*, and *property*, as I often tell myself when Gumpsey is more addleheaded than usual."

"What did Mrs. Softly wish to see me about,

Mrs. Gumpsey? Did she leave word with you?" enquired the minister patiently.

"That she did, Mr. Matheson, which is what I'm just comin' to now. 'I wanted to ask the minister's advice,' says she, rather shy and backwardlike. 'Jane' says I, 'I knowed you since you wore bibs,' —(pourin' her out a cup of tea from the brown teapot as was settin' on the stove-lid, knowin' well how it heartens up folks as is down a bit)—'tell me your trouble, child.' Says she, 'Well, Mrs. Gumpsey, since you ask me, I will! I've had a hard time since Tom died,' the tears comin' easy-like to her eyes.

" 'That you have, child, and you haven't a lazy bone in your body,' says I cheerfully, meanin' to hearten her up a bit. 'Did you want the minister to get you a bit more work, Jane?' says I, knowin' as how you was always helpin' folks.

" 'No! no!' says she, waitin' to drink a saucer of tea. 'The fact is, Joseph Baxter wants to marry me and look after the children,' says she at last, her eyes all red and bleary with wipin' them. '*Which is noble of him*,' says I, all took back as I was, but feelin' I should encourage Jane. 'You might go a long way through the woods and pick up a crookeder stick, that you might, indeed.'

" 'Yes, he's a good man,' says Jane, all upset, 'and will give me a comfortable home. But you see, Mrs. Gumpsey, I hardly know what to do, and that is why I came to get the minister's advice. The truth is I have no decent clothes to be married in, unless—unless I use the money I had laid by to get

poor Tom's tombstone,' says she, wipin' her eyes again. 'I don't know whether I should touch that or not!'

"I will confess I was took back, but very soon the way was made clear to me and my tongue was loosened. I says, '*Take* it, *take* it, Jane—*take* the money, and lay it out on gettin' a good man as will keep the roof over your head. When it comes to choosin' between a man and a stone, *take the man!* says I, 'it bein' hard enough, as is well knowed to Providence to tell which is which as the years wear on,'—not meanin' to discourage Jane, but feelin' it was my duty to speak the truth."

"Well, well, Mrs. Gumpsey," interrupted the minister with a sigh, "I have some writing to do yet, to-night."

"To be sure, you have! Although I will say that you'll get your head all moithered up with your night-settin's. Well, to make a long story short, Jane is takin' him! They're comin' over on Wednesday evenin' at seven o'clock to be joined together for better or worse as is both in the hands of Providence which it will turn out in the long run, which is what I set out to tell you in a few words, Jane wearin' Thomas' tombstone on her back, which is most becomin' to my way of thinking, not that I mean to make light of it!"

"No! no! Mrs. Gumpsey, you are a worthy woman—a most worthy woman," echoed John, absent-mindedly. "It's merely a different interpretation of 'funeral baked meats furnishing forth

the wedding feast,' " quoted John Matheson to himself, in lowered notes.

"To be sure, I don't understand what you mean, Mr. Matheson, there bein' no baked meat in the house. It wouldn't be good for a man of your years to eat the like goin' to bed, supposin' there was! Well, since you won't eat nothin' else, I'll go, but I left some hot, camomile tea steepin' for you which is real soothin', for I will say you do look tired and wore out."

"Thank you! thank you! Mrs. Gumpsey," groaned John, as sinking wearily into his study chair he moaned to himself, "Solitude—solitude is sweet!"

Chapter XVI

COMPLICATIONS

"It was worse than a crime—it was a blunder."

TO be an ideal minister's wife, it is necessary to possess a sound and workable knowledge of all things pertaining to this world—and the world to come. She must be prepared to meet, cheerfully, any emergency which may arise, as for instance, adherents, who do not adhere particularly hard, arriving at meal times to consult with the minister, their physical hunger being out of all proportion to their spiritual!

To those trustful souls who fondly imagine that the minister's house is set in order, that his children appear arrayed in garments of white, and that appetizing (though not too sumptuous) meals lie spread upon his table minus the usual exertion, be it known that they are entertaining a fatal impression!

No degree of spirituality has as yet been able to eliminate work—not even in a manse!

It was a dark day in the history of womankind when that first misdirected chicken fell into the open fire and awakened in our remote ancestor a taste for cooked meats. Up to that time it had not dawned upon his benighted intelligence that food in

its raw state might prove indigestible, in fact, his limited knowledge of anatomy included no digestive apparatus whatever! Possibly his longevity may be traced to his happy ignorance.

On a cold, bleak morning in early December, domestic affairs in Bloomfield manse became sadly complicated. It was one of those dark, threatening days, so fraught with misfortune for the housekeeper. No amount of preparedness could forestall inevitable disaster!

Helen MacDonald's naturally sunny spirit was temporarily over-shadowed by a psychic suggestion from some unknown quarter, portending evil.

"Do you know, Angus," she confided, as she groped in the semi-darkness for her slippers, "I feel as if something were going to happen to-day, that is, something uncomfortable, you know." She gave a little shiver. "Do you ever have these premonitions?"

"I have one this morning," cheerfully responded her husband, "and my fears are well grounded, for I have to take down the long stretch of pipe that runs through the bathroom. Something is interfering with the draught. I hope the disaster you foresee will not be along the line of scorched bacon," he said, anxiously, as the unmistakable aroma floated to them from the kitchen. "Afflictions which befall me in the line of duty, and for my spiritual uplift, I can endure with a certain show of fortitude, but the smell of burnt bacon awakens in me a rebellious and non-ministerial spirit."

"What a dear, comfortable person you are to live with, Angus! Now just supposing we were both alike and each called 'wolf' at the same time, wouldn't it be depressing, to say the least of it?" and Helen gave the last touch to her pretty hair as she turned to her husband.

"Well," observed Angus hopefully, as he donned a very unministerial garment suited to stove-pipe activities, "I suppose we will grow more alike as the years advance. They say people who have been married a number of years do bear a striking resemblance to one another. I think I begin to notice it coming," as he viewed himself complacently in the long mirror. "I am gratified to note a marked improvement in my appearance since I began the slow and laborious process of growing like my pretty little wife."

"Angus, how absurd you can be! Do you know, if you had borne the least resemblance to me, I would never have cared for you? not one bit."

"Now am I resigned to my fate," humbly responded her husband. "I am free to confess that there have been weak moments when I could have craved a more classic profile—but, not now! not now! I am well satisfied—the gods are good! Come along, Helen, my prophetic soul tells me the bacon is cooked to a frazzle."

"Oh, Angus, I am sorry. I know how you dislike it cooked that way. Never mind, I like it well done, and I'll cook some more for you myself, just the way you like it best! You really do deserve nice things,

Angus, for you're not the least, little bit—how shall I describe it—*volcanic!* under provocation, such as burnt bacon, stove-pipes and things."

"You'd hardly expect me to be perturbed in spirit over such trifles as those, surely, would you?" queried her husband, amused at his wife's serious demeanor.

"Well no, not you, Angus—of course not! But such things really have happened," explained Helen in a serious tone, as she carefully laid the pink strips of bacon in the pan. "You see," and her voice dropped to an awed, confidential whisper, "once, I myself heard a man tell his wife, who was such a dear, good little woman too, that he rued the day he had married her—and all because his coffee was not very warm," and the childlike blue eyes grew wide with horror at the remembrance.

Angus laughed, in spite of himself, at the tragic tale and tone.

"And he didn't mean a word of it, Helen, not a word! It was merely the primitive man in him crying out for his food. It's not such a far cry from the days when our worthy forbear seized a club and set forth to secure his morning repast. He was not noted for delicacy of expression—that remote ancestor of ours—in fact he regarded freedom of speech and action as his legitimate prerogative, a viewpoint which tended to develop a spirit of meekness and submission upon the part of his wife. The good old custom has fallen sadly into disuse

in these days," he ventured, glancing at his wife to discover the effect of his words.

"I doubt if it would make for peace. Personally speaking, it would have the opposite effect," and the independent tilt of Helen's head left no cause for doubt as to her opinion on the matter.

"However," she resumed, "let us change the subject, Angus. I feel positively energetic this morning. I realize I am on the verge of accomplishment. I know what I shall do! Since Jean has gone to town for a couple of days and you are going to take down those wretched pipes, the time is at hand for me to thoroughly houseclean the bathroom. The medicine chest is a disgrace to any home, much more to the abode of a minister," she declared, fired with housewifely zeal.

"Far be it from me to interfere," replied her husband, meekly. "I have already learned to tread softly when any housecleaning project is launched. Now for the pipes! If there is one time more than another when a man requires his spiritual armor well adjusted, it is when fitting stove-pipes. If I finish in time I shall run over and have a talk with John Simpson, before mapping out my Sunday's sermon. An hour's visit with John provides one with greater inspiration to preach the gospel than whole days spent in poring over treatises on theology. John has got 'far ben' in spiritual matters."

"Poor fellow! I suppose it's partly because he's laid up all the time, and so removed from the

worldly temptation, don't you think it might be?" queried Helen in a tone of sympathy, as she donned a becoming little dusting cap, preparatory to her labors.

"Do you know, Angus," she continued, "I feel persuaded that if I were to live the life of a recluse, and were to eschew all vanity, I *might*, in the course of time—possibly at an advanced age—attain unto sainthood," and Helen adjusted the pink, beribboned cap more becomingly. "I have always considered the wearing of the plain Salvation Army bonnet nothing short of a means of grace. No woman could be other than humble minded (or openly rebellious) with her crowning glory poked away under its stern, forbidding outline. I have *such* a profound respect and admiration for the Salvation Army! You see, Angus, in my home city they do so much good, I know of so many cases, myself. . . ."

"Yes," affirmed her husband, "they do a great work, and one inspired by the Lord. *In their own way*, they are one of the fruit-bearing branches of the great tree of life."

"There are times, Angus, when I could persuade myself, that if I were not a Presbyterian, I would be a Salvation Army lassie, or matron—*bonnet and all*," testified Helen, her eyes flashing with fervent zeal.

"*Never*, Helen! *never!* don't deceive yourself! You're the best little woman in the world and could rise to any height of sacrifice—providing you

realized your hat was becoming!" and the little cap with the pink ribbons was sadly disarranged, as Angus endeavored to drive home the truth.

"Angus MacDonald! How little you know of the height, length and depth of my character," rejoined Helen laughingly. "Well, I really must go now and begin my labors, and don't you, as you value matrimonial bliss and a quiet life, beckon any one in from the highways and by-ways for dinner! On ordinary occasions I am the most amiable of housekeepers, but housecleaning is a soul-searching process. I really couldn't consider for a moment the possibility of company arriving for meals to-day."

"I certainly won't be tempted to compel any one to come in until I get the pipes up—of that rest assured—unless they come with offers of assistance, which is hardly likely."

"Stovepipes!" ejaculated Helen. "Wretched, inanimate objects, shapen to try men's souls! I shall leave you to your fate," and briskly she set forth to her morning task.

"Don't be too energetic, little girl," her husband called after her, as she hastily mounted the stairs, broom and dustpan in hand. "I can't see a thing to houseclean round this whole place."

"*Men never can!*" she exclaimed, from her place of vantage on the landing. "Their eyes are always sealed to the necessity for housecleaning—a merciful dispensation in some isolated cases, I suppose."

Before long the medicine chest was emptied and its contents deposited in the bath tub.

Helen then conceived the brilliant idea of giving the cabinet itself a fresh coat of enamel, and upon noting the transformation wrought thereby, proceeded to deal likewise with the window frame, bathseat, chair, and to touch up things generally; for it is a widely accepted truth, that having laid your hand to the paint brush, there remaineth no place to turn back.

At times the clang of mutinous pipes smote upon her ears. She realized that her husband was having the usual tussle to make both ends meet, but decided that it was an essential schooling for a minister, and an education which would never come amiss in his calling.

So she left him to his fate!

Having finished the bathroom to her satisfaction, she closed the door against all traffic, deciding that by morning it would be quite dry and ready for use. Alas, for her carefully laid plans!

A loud knock was heard at the manse door. The small maid hastened to open it and admit the untimely visitor, who bore down upon the minister as he was about to adjust the last wire which held the rebellious pipes in submission.

Explanations followed, which floated to Helen where she stood on the upper stairway.

"Furnace refused to draw—no tinsmith in the village—pipes not in favor of union—sorry, the house cold."

Another voice, in cultured accents replied:

"Yes, I've been in the country for a fortnight. Beastly dirty place—no bath provided in the morning, and would you believe it, I left my boots outside the door over night, naturally expecting them to be cleaned, and was ordered—yes, actually *ordered* to take them in again, as the landlord would not be responsible!

"No!—such crude social conditions could never exist at home. Of course, one must be prepared for hardships when living in the Colonies!" he added with a sigh which bespoke forced resignation.

A confused mumble followed, and Helen waited, breathlessly, to see what would ensue. He would surely go when he realized the domestic situation—no, he had hung his hat and coat in the hall!

"'The Philistines be upon us'," quoted Helen, abstractedly, as a mental resumé of what reposed on the pantry shelf flashed through her mind. Cold liver and potatoes, canned peas, stale sponge cake—croquettes, pea salad, trifle! If the worst came to the worst, these left-overs could appear at lunch in this glorified garb.

"You'd have no objection to my taking a dip before lunch, would you, Mr. MacDonald?"

"None whatever, Mr. Fitzgerald, providing things are in shape—but I'm afraid the bathroom is cold, my wife . . "

"Don't mention it, please. We do not accustom ourselves to artificial heat, in fact, we have a theory

at home that a race deteriorates as it becomes used to luxury. I'll glance over the *London Times* while you direct your man to light the fire, if that is your custom—but please do not do so on my account!"

The latter remark escaped Angus, who had already started for the bathroom.

Could Helen believe her ears? A bath! *Impossible!* How could Angus ever agree to such a monstrous proposition!

"Oh, here you are, Helen," exclaimed Angus, with ill-concealed anxiety. "Mr. Fitzgerald, who is somewhat of a newcomer, has been knocking round in the country, and has been missing his morning bath . . . why, what is the matter, Helen?" and Angus stopped, abruptly.

"Can it be possible you didn't remember I was housecleaning the bathroom? Look at it!" and with much dignity she threw wide open the door and laid bare the results of her manifold labors.

"Why, Helen," exclaimed her husband in surprise. "I never had any idea you proposed to make such an upheaval as this. Why, you've been painting!—did you paint the bath tub?" queried Angus, anxiously, as he peered inside. "No!—well, never mind! I'll take out the things and explain conditions to him. I hate to disappoint him!"

"Angus is it *absolutely necessary* that this man have a bath, at this particular moment?"

"I'm sorry, little girl, but it would appear so! Don't you bother! I'll take out the things and put

the tub in shape for him. I explained that the house was somewhat upset, so he'll understand," suggested Angus hopefully, as he hastened to remove the bottles, brushes and other contents.

"Angus, do you know, I could find it in my heart to wish that he might never emerge from this room alive—that the bath tub might prove to him a watery grave!"

"Hush, Helen! He might hear you, and form a wrong opinion of my naturally long-suffering helpmate!"

"I have my limitations," interposed Helen, with just a suggestion of emphasis. "Angus, *be careful!* there is fresh paint on the window-sill and chair! Perhaps you might just leave the chair there, dear, it is so nice and impressionable!"

"Helen," replied Angus, his patience sorely tried, "you spoke the truth when you said I had not yet fathomed your nature. You know you don't mean what you are saying."

"With all my heart, *I do*, Angus—that is, for the passing moment!" qualified Helen, whose position was weakening visibly.

"There—that is the best I can do," announced Angus, rising wearily. "Where can I find the bath towels?"

"Oh, I'll get them, Angus, and some of my nicest bath soap too, you dear, patient, old thing! You're always helping 'lame dogs over stiles,' and so good about it, too! Take that big, scrubby towel, dear,

it's inset with steel filings, urge the man to use it freely —do! and I'll go and compose my features to meet him when he issues forth from the bath."

"Poor Helen! I don't blame her!" reflected her husband. "But it would never do to encourage a rebellious spirit, for complications are sure to arise in a manse and it's best to be prepared for the inevitable."

Angus descended into the bowels of the cellar, and after one last bout with the lower furnace pipe a fire was lighted. Performing his toilet as best he could at the kitchen sink, he once more entered the living-room, where his guest, not noticing the lack of well-distributed heat, was seated comfortably before the open fire.

"Now, Mr. Fitzgerald, just come this way. I'll take you to the bathroom. Sorry to have been so long but things were rather upset. My wife was doing a little renovating."

"I pray you won't mention it, Mr. MacDonald. I am prepared to overlook trifles like that, providing I may have my bath. I will admit, though, that I am partial to a particular brand of soap—preferably Pears. You haven't it?—no; a Canadian make of soap?—yes, yes! Thank you! the towels are perfect—this large one is my choice. I always make it a practice to rest, wrapped in a warm blanket, for a period of twenty-five minutes immediately following my bath. Yes, thank you, that heavy one will do nicely! The couch in the study—

you are most kind; a couple of pillows—just so!—that will elevate my head to exactly the proper degree! On the surface, these might seem minor details, but you will agree with me that strict attention to these rules promotes longevity. Oh, by the way, would you mind mentioning to your wife that for lunch I am accustomed to take hot buttered toast with orange marmalade—preferably made with Seville oranges!"

Angus MacDonald experienced a sudden stiffening of his spinal column as he answered, "My wife will provide for your comfort, Mr. Fitzgerald. I trust you may awake refreshed."

"Angus, what did he want?" enquired Helen anxiously, as he returned to the room. "Not marmalade?" she exclaimed in dismay, "Why, I haven't a bit in the house! Shall I run over to the store and get some? Perhaps the poor man suffers from a weak stomach which has to be considered."

"Of that I can't say, but at all events, he doesn't suffer from *weak nerve!*" responded the minister with unmistakable emphasis, as he set forth to procure the special brand of marmalade requested.

Having performed his ablutions and rested in his blankets the prescribed length of time, their guest issued forth—refreshed in body and renewed in spirit. It needed but a glimpse at the favorite brand of marmalade, and the tempting erection of hot, buttered toast awaiting his consumption, to add the last drop to an already heaped-up cup of comfort.

Under their beneficent influence he grew loquacious and entertaining. Many were the revelations he made regarding social conditions back home, and not always did they redound to the credit of the fair Dominion in which he had elected to make a livelihood.

"Do you think of returning, Mr. Fitzgerald?" queried his hostess sweetly, as she plied her guest freely with toast.

"Not at present, Mrs. MacDonald. I was over home last year, but things were just a bit tight over there! Of course, in a new country like yours—so short a time reclaimed from the savages—conditions are bound to be more or less crude, and its people, as you will readily agree, will naturally be influenced by their surroundings. But then again, on the other hand, money is easier in the Colonies, and in the last analysis a man requires to consider upon which side his bread is buttered."

"Just so!" responded Angus, lapsing into a ministerial colloquialism. "Will you be served to some more toast, Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"Not any more, thank you, and I shall have to ask you to excuse me if I hasten on. I wish to reach town before the post-office closes—I expect a registered letter from home. Pardon my introducing personal affairs, Mrs. MacDonald. I have enjoyed your hospitality very much indeed—the more so since I was a comparative stranger to your husband, having just met him on one former oc-

casion, but I have learned that a warm welcome is always accorded to me in the home of a minister. Eight miles, is it, Mr. MacDonald? Right-o! Not worth mentioning! Good-bye—Good-bye! I trust I have not inconvenienced you."

"Farewell—a long farewell," breathed Helen, as the door closed.

"I rather suspected he was a remittance man. However, like true Colonials, we did our bit—eh, Helen?"

Chapter XVII

THE STORM

"The winter of my discontent."

I DO wonder what can be keeping Angus, he should have been back long ago, Jean. It's still snowing hard, and with this high wind I'm afraid there will be heavy drifts," and Helen gazed long and anxiously out upon the storm-swept road, piled high with new fallen snow.

"Now, Helen, don't you worry! You know a minister never can tell how long he'll be detained. Angus is perfectly safe, he's driving old Bess, whose sound horse sense is equal to any emergency," replied Jean, reassuringly. "Come and have a cup of tea, dear, and one of these nice, hot biscuits—what proud structures they are, by the way! It is amazing—the power which creature comforts possess to support one in the hour of affliction—imaginary or otherwise."

"I'm afraid it has turned very cold in the last hour or two, don't you think so, Jean?" and Helen shivered with nervous fear, notwithstanding that the knots in the great fireplace blazed cheerily. "I'll put on some more fire, for I'm afraid Angus will be chilled through," and realizing that action is the one panacea for suspense, Jean did not attempt to

assist as Helen piled high the logs, until the flames roared merrily up the wide chimney, and the room was flooded with cheer and warmth.

"You don't think, Jean—" and Helen stopped abruptly, her appealing eyes full of apprehension.

"No! I don't think anything of the kind," announced Jean, firmly. "If you had spent as many winters in the country as I have, you would be quite accustomed to storms and drifted roads. Why, I've seen my father start out in the middle of the roughest night that ever blew, to carry the gospel torch to some flickering, eleventh-hour soul. This is nothing at all," she added encouragingly, "it would have to storm for hours yet, before the roads would be impassable."

Slowly the evening wore away its interminable length, Jean bravely endeavoring to relieve Helen's anxiety, but ever and anon any lull in the conversation was filled by the tortured moaning of the wind as it struggled through the long stretch of flue to escape from its narrow imprisonment. Sharp reports followed at intervals, as the old manse lay wrenched in the relentless grip of the frost.

As the swirling storm increased in intensity, Jean pulled down the blinds to hide the view of the snow-piled road, for Helen's courage was ebbing low.

Suddenly the welcome music of sleighbells sounded in the near distance, and before the anxious watchers could realize it, Angus, in all his white and glistening glory, stood in their midst. A kindly neighbor had watched him making his tortuous

way through the heavy drifts, and had insisted that the minister go into the house forthwith, while he took care of old Bess, who had proven so sure-footed and trustworthy.

"Oh, Angus, are you very badly frozen? I know you must be!" and Helen, with tears of relief coursing down her cheeks, attempted with trembling fingers to unfasten his greatcoat.

"Frozen? Well, I should say not! Why, what kind of a tearful welcome is this? One would imagine I was returning from an Arctic expedition, having failed in my objective to reach the Pole!" and Angus stamped himself clear of the snow, as he hung his frost-covered coat in the outer porch to melt by degrees, and came back to the cheery fire.

"Oh, Angus! I thought you would never come back alive! I'm so thankful!" and pulling her husband down to her level, she wound her arms round his neck in a loving embrace of relief and gratitude.

Jean, meanwhile, had set forth to the kitchen for hot broth, and toast, and such-like harmless and easy-to-take restoratives.

How blessed the relief which follows upon anxiety and suspense! It is like the "gentle dew from heaven," and how quickly do we swing to the other side of care-freeness and cheer.

Now that Angus was once more seated comfortably in their midst, they could even laugh at their ungrounded fears, while he explained that he had fallen in with John Matheson.

"By the way, Helen," he said, "I told him we were about to track him to his lair—probably some day at the latter end of next week, providing he raised no serious objections. I am anxious to see the new Community Building in connection with his church," and Angus leaned back luxuriously in his great chair as he stretched his slippered feet to the warmth of his own hearth-stone. "What do you girls say about it, eh?"

"Oh, of course we'll go, that is if those awful bumpy roads ever get level again. I'd just love it," answered Helen enthusiastically. "I'm sure you will enjoy it, too, Jean."

"Why, yes," responded the latter. "Personally speaking, I imagine it would be most interesting, but are you quite sure, Angus, that he wants to be molested—that is, by comparative strangers, like myself for instance? People who live alone for any length of time, learn to appreciate their solitary state. They prefer not to have their privacy intruded upon," and Jean bent down to pick up a magazine which had slipped to the floor.

"John Matheson is no recluse, not by any means," answered Angus, coming quickly to the defence of his friend, "Possibly he may be somewhat dominated by the presiding genius of his own home—but then, what man is not held down and repressed beneath his own roof-tree," sighing dolorously. "Oh, by the way, Jean, he asked especially after you."

"That was very good of him, I'm sure. His

consideration for the stranger in his midst does him credit," commented Jean with assumed indifference, although a sudden flush, not due to the heat of the blazing logs, mounted to her cheek.

"If you two girls could keep a secret, I'd tell you something I heard the other day concerning John."

"Why, of course we can, Angus," announced Helen confidently. "I'm a very safety deposit for secrets!"

Jean's every faculty was on the alert, but she preserved an outward calm.

"What is it? Do tell us, Angus? Is he to be married?" questioned Helen, eagerly.

"I did hear that there was some one for whom he cared very much, but she didn't care to live in the country. She would be quite willing to marry him if he had a city pastorate."

Jean took a tight grip of herself, but a feeling of utter desolation and loneliness laid hold on her. The lean years stretched ahead their interminable length—*alone*—always alone—down the rose-strewn pathway of June, and along the sorrowing, leafless November road—winter and summer—summer and winter, in weary, endless succession! No! no! This would *never* do, she would not permit such moments of weakness to take possession of her.

"Well, if that story is true," continued Angus, "and country life is the obstacle to his happiness, the barrier can soon be removed, for I heard to-day that John had been approached by one of the most outstanding universities on the continent to accept

the position of president. Of course it was bound to come,—he is widely recognized as a distinguished scholar, and I am not in the least surprised, myself."

"Isn't that just splendid," exclaimed Helen joyfully. "Of course we always knew he was so clever and fitted to fill any position; but, how his people will hate to see him go—he has done such wonderful things for them, they just worship him" and Helen's face reflected both pleasure and regret.

"Well, there's nothing decided upon yet," continued Angus, "it is possible he may not see his way clear to accept it—he may not consider his work done here, and the fact that the presidency is more of a limelight job will not weigh with John, not in the very least degree."

"But, Angus, if the young woman he is to marry does not care to live in the country, that will surely influence his decision, don't you think."

"If I'm not greatly mistaken, Helen, John Matheson is not going to take for his wife a poor, spineless creature whose love for him is expressed in *city versus country* terms. A man doesn't want the kind of a woman who can love him in the city and not in the country. Take yourself, for instance, supposing you had not liked the country, would you have allowed me to pursue my lone and solitary way?"

"Now, Angus, you know that is quite out of the question," replied Helen, reproachfully. "You know perfectly well, that I should want to be where you were, no matter where it was! Of course, I can

be happy anywhere, and invariably take root wherever I am transplanted. But then, everyone is not like me in that way, you know."

"No, little woman, they are not!" and his eyes rested lovingly upon her with inexpressible yearning, as she moved about the cheerful room, setting it in order for the night.

"Well, Helen, if you and Angus will excuse me, I'll say good-night. I feel I can no longer minister to your comfort or well-being," and Jean, who had been to all appearances abstractedly turning over the pages of a favorite author, rose to go.

"Good-night, Jean! I'm just going too. How the wind howls and screeches, Angus! How thankful I am that you are safe at home!"

"Yes," replied Angus, lifting the blind for a last survey of the drifted roads. "This storm is ahead of anything I've seen in this country—it would do credit to the Highlands! I hope John got home safely—he was going down the back line to see a sick woman before he went on to Beresford. Those side roads are pretty tough travelling, as they drift up so quickly," and Angus looked anxiously out upon the storm which showed no sign of abating.

"Oh, Angus, do you think—you feel quite sure that he's all right, don't you?" asked Helen anxiously.

"How can we find out, Angus?" breathed Jean Sinclair, in a low, tense whisper, which bared her inmost soul to the gaze of Angus MacDonald, who

quivered at the revelation but made no outward sign.

"I think I'll wait up a little longer, girls," volunteered Angus. "Doctor Rolston passed me when I was coming home. He was going to the same place where John was calling and should be back before this," and he assumed a cheerfulness of manner which was intended to be reassuring. "By the way, there are bells, now. I'll go out."

After a word with the doctor, Angus entered smiling.

"John is all right—safe in Beresford manse, drinking deeply at the fount of Mrs. Gumpsey's wisdom, diluted by quarts of hot, boneset tea, if I mistake not."

"Oh, Jean, isn't it a blessed relief," breathed Helen. "We can go to bed now with our minds at rest, it's very late. You want to wait up a while longer to keep the fire going, did you say, Angus? How you do love an excuse to sit up at nights, don't you, dear? Yes, I know you want to look over a new book!"

Jean was at a loss to account for the conflicting emotions with which she was torn as she tried in vain to sleep.

Why should she be seized with such unseemly wrath, when reflecting on the woman who refused to share country life with John Matheson? What had that to do with her? She had never heretofore been one to dictate another's policy, nor yet to speculate upon their private affairs.

So, she had discovered the secret of the lonely manse,—and she had imagined, in her woman's weakness, that there had been none other—that perhaps . . .

But why allow her thoughts to continually centre around the minister at Beresford? Knowing what she did, she was now forewarned, and no one—least of all John Matheson, himself—should ever suspect her secret.

But as she turned on her sleepless pillow, and the wind chanted its miserere, she marvelled greatly over the poverty of some lives, and at the wealth of love and devotion laid at the feet of favored ones who would not so much as stretch out a hand to receive it!

In the meantime, John Matheson was being subjected to the manifold ministrations of Mrs. Gumpsey, whose overwhelming attention and solicitude regarding his imaginary ills, was fast becoming more than man, born of woman, could endure and preserve an outward calm. His welcome from the long, cold drive lacked nothing of its accustomed warmth and intensity.

"Come in, come in, Mr. Matheson! For the land's sake, come away in out of the bitin' cold! I've been settin' here this two hours back, rockin' to and fro and lookin' for you to be brought in a frozen corpse, that I have," wiping away tears of relief in the corner of her capacious apron. "You bein' that set on takin' the back line road as you

never see a fence on from November to sugar-makin', which is gospel truth, as I've knowed the road well before you was short-coated. Come away in out of the cold hall! Come and set here by the fire!"

"Don't trouble about me, Mrs. Gumpsey. I'm not in the least cold. Just let me take off my overshoes."

"Here, set in this big chair. I do declare I'm all of a tremble, fearin' you would be comin' home settin' up in the cutter froze stiff, holdin' on to the lines—as I've heard of such things happenin' afore now. Folks ought to be forehanded and get religion when they're well and able, and knowed what they was about, not waitin' till they're feared of bein' took, and then keepin' honest folks out of their beds helpin' them to get it! Jane Simpkins was always one for puttin' off her duty as she ought to have looked to! Which was what I told Gumpsey—him bein' that dazed and deaf that there was no puttin' sense in him, for all he nodded his head as much as to say he heard what I was talkin' about—which is well knowed he didn't. Here, Mr. Matheson, drink this herb tea which has been brewin' for you the last three hours back," and she urged upon him a generous cup of her fragrant decoction.

"Really, Mrs. Gumpsey, I don't feel that I require it," remonstrated he, bending his neck to the yoke.

"Which you know nothin' about, Mr. Matheson,

I will say, if you'd take some good, sensible settled-down woman to wife, as would look well to your woollens, and hold you from settin' out on stormy nights over roads as ain't fit for man or beast, it would take a burden off my shoulders as is like to cut me off in the flower of my day, that it is." and Mrs. Gumpsey's form heaved convulsively, as she reflected upon her untimely demise.

"I should be very sorry to think I was the means of causing you so much trouble and anxiety, Mrs. Gumpsey," replied the minister, reaching for the unopened mail which lay at his hand.

"To be sure, I will say as men go, you are next to no trouble, and it's sorry I would be in some ways to see any other woman havin' the care over you, for there's no denying it as we think the most of those as is least able to look to the carin' of themselves. Well, I'll bid you good-night, or—which would be more fittin' to say, good-mornin'—and I hope to kind Providence you won't be bedrid from the chillin' you've got!"

"Good-night, Mrs. Gumpsey," answered John Matheson, nothing loath to see the ample form of his solicitous housekeeper disappear behind the closed door of the study.

What though the storm raged without, the winds shrieked out in veriest agony, and the frost king clutched the old, stone manse in his titanic grip until it cracked in his fingers, John Matheson's heart sang within him, as he piled more wood in

the old box stove and seated himself in the firelight's glow.

The sweet presence of Jean Sinclair would one day, soon, fill this very room! Thenceforth, it would be a hallowed spot. He would not attempt to stem the tide of happiness which her brief presence in his manse would bring—there would be many long, weary years ahead when the memory of those few hours would be as food and drink to a starving man.

"Oh, for youth!" he cried, "to match with her short span!"

No! no! he was old and full of years in comparison. Let him write that on the tablets of his heart—lest he forget—*lest he forget!*

Blowing out the flickering night lamp which had burned low with the passing of the hours, he lifted the curtain to look out once more upon the night.

Lo! the storm had ceased—the world, white, peaceful and pure, lay sleeping, bathed in moonlight, and a great peace, and a feeling of eternal well-being filled John Matheson's soul.

Some time—somewhere—when God so willed, all crooked paths would be made straight and rough places smooth, and the "peace which passeth all understanding" soothed his soul as he turned to rest.

Chapter XVIII

"INASMUCH"

"*The vision and the faculty divine.*"

THE following morning, when John Matheson for obvious reasons seized the moment of his departure from the manse to announce to his housekeeper the fact that the Rev. Mr. MacDonald, Mrs. MacDonald and their guest, Miss Sinclair, would pay him a visit next day and take the mid-day meal with him, that capable and well-meaning individual was greatly agitated in mind, or as she graphically described her condition, she was "upset and took back!"

"I do declare, Mr. Matheson, this is more than human mortal can stand—that it is," and she sank, helpless, into a nearby chair, her hands buried in the enveloping folds of her big checked apron. "Folks comin' to this house for dinner no later than the very day followin', which will be to-morrow, providin' we're spared to see it, and the fat goose as ought to have been hangin' by his neck this week back, waddlin' round as unconscious-like as if he wouldn't be lyin' on the platter this time to-morrow if it's so willed, with his legs pointin' heavenward, which is a fittin' position for him to set in before the minister, it not bein' so pertickler about the

others! I'll do the best that lies in me, though," she affirmed with restored self-confidence, as she literally rose to the occasion, and began to walk towards the door. "I'll set fittin' cooked meats before them, for I will say you're a well meanin' and deservin' man and should have the best as can be got, likewise," warming to her subject—"when I lay my hand to gettin' up a dinner to set before strange folk, there's none can make higher rizcake nor flakier pie-crust; no more can they set up a fowl, as has his stuffin' hot and seasoned to taste within his bosom, not forgettin' the chopped onion and pinch of sage as you can sense from the front gate when he's a cookin'!"

"Yes, yes! Mrs. Gumpsey," agreed the minister, interrupting the tide of her fluency, "I don't for a moment doubt that you will have everything in apple pie order."

"That I will! That I will, Mr. Matheson! You just go to your sick folks and set at your sermons. Have no fear—although, speakin' of apple pie do remind me of Susan Crum, my counsin's wife on my mother's side, her as . . . "

But the minister, fearing a burst of confidence, or deluge of reminiscence, bade her a cheery good-bye, and closing the door quietly behind him went forth into the cold, clear, morning air, every step ringing out sharply with the frosty crunching of the snow beneath his feet.

His earliest call would be at the home of Mrs. Small, who lived at the far end of a side street which

was thickly banked with snow and well nigh impassable. James Small had been killed in a train accident, and the loving and devoted husband and father had been laid away to his rest under the June roses, where now, in the cold, bleak, winter days, he slept well and soundly under his downy, spotless coverlet.

The minister must see if those left to battle on alone were provided with fuel and food on this merciless morning, for to the ill-nourished and thinly clad, truly "winter is as cruel as death, and hungry as the grave."

Breaking his way to the door through the high drifts of snow which were piled on a level with the window sill, he espied the faces of little Bennie and Nellie peering out at him through the clear spaces in the window panes, from which they had scraped away the frost-imprinted trees and foliage, and where Nellie of the dark ringlets and bright eyes, was describing innumerable circles by the use of her mother's thimble.

Climbing down from his point of vantage, Bennie hastened to admit the minister, and to explain that mother was out in the woodshed trying to split some chunks that were so big that the stove door wouldn't shut and which smoked awfully and hurt his eyes,—rubbing the same vigorously with his little, chubby fists by way of establishing proof.

"When I get growed out to be a man," volunteered Bennie proudly, drawing himself up to the full height of his colossal stature, "I'll split them.

I don't think it's nice to see ladies choppin' wood. Anyways, they can't do it as good as men can, they don't hit straight. This is the way they ought to hit the stick," and seizing a nearby hammer, he prepared to give a demonstration of the manner in which an axe should be wielded in order to prove most effective, John Matheson coming to the rescue of the woodbox just in time.

"Come along, Bennie! we'll go out and send mother in to Nellie, and I'll chop the wood and you can carry it in."

Bennie, nothing loath, ran to find his cap, which, after the manner of caps, was never found twice in the same place. Pulling it down hurriedly over his unruly locks, he placed his little, dimpled hand confidently in that of John Matheson, who lost no time in taking him to the scene of action.

Mrs. Small was well and truly described by her name. A tiny, delicately formed woman, possessing an abundance of shining black hair, brushed smoothly back from her forehead, revealing great dark eyes which seemed to be ever searching for an explanation of the mystery and tragedy of life.

"Here, Mrs. Small, give me the axe! This is just the exercise I require. Bennie and I will very soon have a pile of wood ready, and if ever you attempt anything of this kind again, I shall consider it a reflection upon my ability to handle an axe."

"Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Matheson. You have been so good to me and to the children since—since—but I don't like your doing this," she added,

with a half concealed choke in her voice, "it doesn't seem right, somehow, that the minister . . . "

"Nothing wrong about making the little ones comfortable, is there, Mrs. Small? You go in out of this cold shed, and in a few minutes Bennie and I will make short work of these stubborn knots."

"Yes, Mother, you go on in, and me and the minister will do all the biggest sticks for you."

Cheerily John Matheson laid his hand to his self-appointed task and if, while he sawed and chopped in the widow's shed, his mind reverted to the letter in his pocket, regarding the acceptance of the presidency of the greatest university in the land, the humble task to which he had committed himself presented to his mind no incongruity.

"Do you cut all the wood at your house, Mr. Matheson?" enquired Bennie—lost in admiration over the master strokes which were fast severing the great chunks.

"Well no, Bennie, I can't say that I do," replied the minister, resting momentarily from his labors.

"Does your wife cut them then while you're out helpin' folks?" he further queried, fixing his eyes, great with enquiry, on the minister's face.

"Oh, no, Bennie—that would hardly be consistent," replied John Matheson, laughing heartily. "You see, laddie, I have no wife."

"*No wife!*" exclaimed Bennie, in open amazement. "No wife! Why, who gets your dinner ready? I thought when men growed up they had to get a wife to cook their meals and—and sew up their

clothes when they get torn," with a self-conscious glance at the recently inflicted gash in his own sleeve. "I'm going to have one, anyways," he added conclusively, nodding his curly head in proud assurance. "Don't you want one, Mr. Matheson? They make you not lonesome, you know."

Poor John! "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, proceedeth wisdom."

A fleeting vision of Jean Sinclair seated at his hearth passed quickly before the eyes of his soul. To-morrow! She would be there. To-morrow! He would have himself well in hand though—he would enjoy every little moment of her presence—he had planned his every word and action in so far as it lay in his power! Of what worth was a well trained mind, he argued bravely,—the result of years of studious application and self-control, if it prove not now his strong tower.

To see Jean Sinclair seated at his table, and to hear her voice, would be happiness inexpressible—a fool's paradise, doubtless, but at all events he would see to it that his secret be not suspected.

"'Though this be madness, yet there's method in it'" he murmured to himself, as he lifted a great armful of wood and carried it into the kitchen, followed closely by little Bennie, who, his willingness having outdone his strength, was dropping the sticks at intervals from his overladen little arms, on his long journey to the woodbox.

Filling the big cookstove until it blazed and crackled merrily, John Matheson, with the delicacy

which reaches conclusions regardless of enquiry, was able to bring cheer, and to brighten the home of the widow. Amidst the fervently expressed appreciation of the mother, and the prolonged farewells of the children, he once more started out upon the heavily drifted road, and so absorbed in his own thoughts was he that he failed to notice Dr. Rolston's horse and cutter laboriously bearing down upon him.

"I say, Mr. Matheson, is it your suicidal intent to cast yourself under my chariot wheels?" enquired the doctor, his cheery voice calling John back to a sense of his surroundings, as the cutter drew up by his side.

"Why, good-morning, Doctor," shaking his hand in happy recognition. "I can't imagine how I missed seeing you as you drove up over the hill. I—I was thinking . . . "

"You're growing absent-minded, I'm afraid," suggested the doctor with grave concern. "There are only two causes for this serious disorder known to the medical profession—one is over study, and—have I your permission to name the other?—love! Yours is a difficult case to diagnose, I fear," he went on as he looked into the face of John Matheson, glowing with exercise and the exhilarating effect of the frosty morning walk. "as regards over study, your countenance gives no indication—indeed, at the present moment it's far from being 'sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought.'

"The latter disease, however, is much more

deadly and difficult to combat, there being such a disinclination on the part of the patient to reveal any symptoms of love-sickness, or to dwell upon its attendant pangs! Indeed, there have been isolated cases known to medical science, where the patient, rather than consult a physician and secure timely advice, has chosen to succumb to the malady!"

John Matheson's boyish laugh rang out merrily, although the sad and unfortunate end of the faint-hearted individual referred to scarce called for such untimely mirth.

"Well, I promise you this, Dr. Rolston," he assured him, as he gave the doctor's hand a hearty grip, "if I ever reach a stage where I require medical attention or advice along those lines, I shall know where to procure it."

"I appreciate your sentiments, and would like to say that I'd have the same confidence in calling upon you for assistance in my hour of extremity," replied the doctor.

John Matheson's face suddenly grew serious as he caught a glimpse of the passing shadow which rested momentarily on the brave, true face of the young physician.

"Doctor Rolston," he said, "you are young—young—in the very prime of your God-given manhood. All things are yours to win!" and John gazed far out upon the snow-laden hills.

Dr. Rolston was at a loss to account for this sudden lapse into earnestness, as he looked into the

noble, manly face, lit up with the dark, grey eyes which looked into his with such a straight-forward, unwavering expression that he could not doubt the sincerity of the soul.

"Thank you, Mr. Matheson. I feel as though some telepathic message had passed from your soul to mine—psychic suggestion, you may possibly call it—I'm not just quite clear—but I have a vision of future well-being, a sensation new to me of late," and gripping the hand of his friend in farewell, he urged his horse over the unbroken road; for at the far end there lay a man, racked with pain, to whom he, with his skill and knowledge of medical science, could bring relief.

"A noble profession," pronounced John Matheson, as he resumed his journey to the village store and post-office, which was presided over by one Jonas Weakly.

Jonas, though noted for his industry and his untiring application to business, was sadly lacking in the rudiments of education. Many a time and oft had the minister come to his assistance and straightened out his financial affairs, this being one of the occasions when his services were in demand.

And so the morning wore away in loving, helpful service, and John Matheson was well content to minister to the needs of his people, and to make lighter their burdens, although the lamp burned late in the minister's study during the long nights; for days spent in the homes of the congregation mean hours of midnight study.

But who can say where the message began or ended—who knows whether the sermons lived out before the eyes of the people during the commonplace every day, and the sermons preached from the pulpit on the Sabbath, were not equally potent for good!

Chapter XIX

JOHN MATHESON ENTERTAINS

"With thee conversing, I forget all time."

ON the following day, when John Matheson returned to the tree-sentinelled manse in time to welcome his expected guests, he discovered the atmosphere vibrant with action, and all things in a state of spotless perfection.

Every nook and corner had been swept and dusted —even the sacred precincts of the study had not been exempt from the touch of ruthless hands, although the minister had, on different occasions, in vain tried to impress on his housekeeper's mind the necessity for leaving his books and papers in the same studied disorder in which she found them.

The old boxstove shone forth resplendently in its new coat of shimmering black. The blooming geraniums in the window, had, after much debate on the part of Mrs. Gumpsey as to whether they would show to the best advantage turned to the road or to the inside of the room, been given the latter position. In all the gorgeousness of their scarlet and pink array they stood awaiting the admiration of the company.

The thin place in the carpet, in front of the minister's desk, had been successfully camouflaged

by the use of a huge hooked mat, which bore, emblazoned upon its surface, a beast, the like of which was never seen on land nor sea, nor would the discovery of the same prove a desirable addition to the already created animal world.

This glorified dog, or anthropological specimen, boasted proudly of a pale pink complexion, which deepened to carmine ere it reached the long-drawn-out extremity of his nose. Faded, corn-colored eyes of different dimensions belied the apparently ferocious set of his waving, green tail, and set at naught the elongated, blue ears which stood upright with apparent murderous intent.

The housekeeper having requested space upon the manse walls for her most valued pictures, a bevy of the deceased members of the Gumpsey family, in enlarged editions, looked down from their point of vantage, displaying a mild and dignified interest, and a self-control and assurance which could not be moved.

There was Uncle Ezra Gumpsey who gazed with far-seeing eyes, holding his wife's hand in his, although, to all outward appearances, there seemed to be a lack of spontaneity in the grip. This, however, might be accounted for on the grounds that for fifty long years Ezra had sat in that attitude, dutifully holding his wife's hand, and who shall say whether the apparent enthusiasm of the most devoted husband might not wane ere the half-century mark of constant hand-holding be reached!

Aunt Eliza Gumpsey, oblivious to lines, the

necessity for which is so forcibly brought home to any one by the present-day dressmaker, sat in unfettered ease,her spirit unperturbed by introspection or psycho analysis, her honest, hard-working hand resting in the gnarled, toil-worn palm of her husband, where she had placed it in unquestioning confidence fifty years gone by. The rearing of twelve hardy, God-fearing Canadians left Aunt Eliza little time to conjecture as to whether or not Uncle Ezra really appreciated her many fine points or properly *understood* her, owing, doubtless, to a peculiar refinement of temperament which was born with her. No—the old fashioned word *duty* loomed large in the vocabulary of that day and generation, and when properly interpreted in terms of daily work, left little time to indulge in such vagaries.

"Let not ambition mock their useful toil."

Who better deserve to have their pictures hung high among the illustrious and undying of the land, than those, who, through their tireless industry and unswerving devotion to duty, discovered anew this Canada of ours, and made of it a garden wherein their children, and their children's children, might enjoy an abundant heritage!

Both by instinct and foreknowledge did John Matheson conclude that his foot should, for his own peace of mind, be withdrawn from his house on the momentous occasion when preparations for company were going on apace, and it was within a few minutes of the time set for the arrival of the guests when he returned to the manse, slipping

quietly in, that he might escape the vigilant eye of Mrs. Gumpsey.

Alas, no! She stood on guard to welcome him, arrayed in her best black silk, which fitted her ample figure so admirably that John Matheson, unlearned as he was in the intricacies of women's gowns, found himself, to his great confusion, confronted by two unanswerable queries:

1. By what process did his housekeeper get into that dress?
2. By what possible operation could she ever hope to become extricated from it?

He dared not, nor would he permit himself to speculate upon what might be the inevitable outcome, should the heavy responsibility placed upon the rather fragile and isolated fasteners prove eventually too heavy to be borne!

"It's all set in readiness, Mr. Matheson," announced Mrs. Gumpsey with perspiring pride, "and I will say no better cooked meal was ever set before a minister, not to mention his friends as comes to visit with him. Come away in and see for yourself; seein' is believin' next to tastin'—which I was tellin' Gumpsey, if he do set in, not to be reachin' across the table for his victuals with his fork, puttin' folks eyes out . . . "

Here a sound of sleigh bells threw the worthy woman into a *state*—as she vividly described her excited condition.

"I do declare I can neither set nor stand—I'm all of a moither—but I'll not desert the minister,

not now, when he's most needin' a sensible woman about him as can keep her head," and having reached this noble decision, she awaited the entrance of the guests with massive dignity.

"Don't you run out to fetch them and get your death of cold, Mr. Matheson. Gumpsey is on hand to take the minister's horse—leastways, I told him to be settin' round waitin'. There he goes, to be sure, layin' hold of the beast . . . "

In a moment the door was thrown wide open in welcome by John Matheson himself, and the long-looked-for guests were at last under his roof.

"You are most welcome, Mrs. MacDonald; this is like old times to see you, Angus," shaking their hands warmly. "Miss Sinclair," and his eyes looked into the bright, upturned face, glowing from the effects of the long, frosty drive, "I am glad to see you in Beresford manse," nor did the expression of his countenance belie the truth of his statement.

"It's good of you to invite me, Mr. Matheson," replied Jean graciously. "I must confess I was anxious for an opportunity to—to observe your habits at home," and her dark eyes sparkled merrily.

Just at this juncture the advancing figure of Mrs. Gumpsey hove in sight.

"Allow me to introduce Mrs. Gumpsey, my housekeeper, Mrs. MacDonald—Miss Sinclair. Mr. MacDonald needs no introduction."

"To be sure he do not," replied Mrs. Gumpsey, having shaken hands warmly with all, "though I

will say—and it's gospel truth it is, and no gainsayin'—that since he got a woman of his own he sets home with her nights, instead of comin' over here, which is proper and fittin'. But come away down into the spare room and lay by your things. It be cold in here to be sure, which is to be expected of spare rooms. I often say to the minister when he is going to stay overnight in other folks houses, 'Be careful and pull on your bed-socks,' says I, 'and put on your wool dressin' coat, for who knows if the spare bed has ever been laid open since last spring cleanin', and is like to give you your death of ammonia, or worse!'"

"That is very thoughtful of you, Mrs. Gumpsey, and you have everything so comfortable and spotless," replied Mrs. MacDonald with outspoken appreciation.

"Yes, indeed, the room looks most inviting," added Jean, as she caught a glimpse from the western window of the snow-laden hills which stretched away in the distance, as far as the eye could see.

"Well, I will say—which is no more than the truth—that I do the best any mortal woman can do to look to the minister's comfort, but—" and here her voice sank to a confidential whisper, "it will lift a load off my back, it will indeed, when the minister gets his own woman. But come," with renewed energy, "the men folk are settin' in by the fire warmin' themselves. You just walk right in and make yourselves as if you was at home, and I'll

go out and dish up the dinner which is done to a turn."

"Oh, how very comfortable you are here, Mr. Matheson," exclaimed Jean as they entered the study, which was a combination of study and sitting room, its original furnishings having been added to by a few of Mrs. Gumpsey's choice possessions. "I feel sure that in summer time this old, ivy-covered manse must be an ideal spot," and Jean turned her sweet, animated face to John for confirmation.

"Yes, I'm very comfortable and happy, if good housekeeping and fine views can produce happiness, Miss Sinclair," and Jean, catching a fleeting expression and a sudden appeal of tone, wondered how the woman he loved could hesitate one moment to share life with him in the quaint, old, tree-shadowed manse.

Flushed with pride and expectancy, Mrs. Gumpsey entered to bid them to a feast which lay spread in the long, hospitable dining room.

"Now, just set in, all of you. You take your own place at the foot, in front of the goose, Mr. Matheson—which is a fittin' place for you. Miss Sinclair, you take the seat opposite him and pour the tea out, for when there's company to dinner I'm so run off my feet fetchin' vittles back and forth, that I don't set in. Mrs. MacDonald, please go over to the other side, opposite your man, for I do like to see folks paired off, I do! And I'm glad to see our own minister with a partner for once, that I am.

Now, Mr. Matheson, just lay to and cut up the fowl. Don't forget the stuffin' nor the giblet sauce, and I'll fetch in the potatoes and turnips from the kitchen."

"I think, Angus, you'd make a better job of this than I," suggested John, as he proceeded to disjoint the fowl.

"Oh, no, old chap! You cannot shift your domestic responsibilities on to my shoulders. I will be willing to do my share later on," Angus assured him, as with every eye rivetted upon him the carver pursued his task.

If John Matheson or Jean Sinclair were conscious of the significance of their positions there was nothing in their manner which would indicate it, though John's heart beat irregularly, and his hand lacked its usual steadiness, as he realized the presence of the woman he loved—at the head of his lonely table.

During the triumphal progress of the dinner, Mrs. Gumpsey's tongue was relaxed to greater fluency, and when all had united heartily in praise of the feast, her satisfaction knew no bounds. Standing at the dining-room door, laden with dishes which she was about to bear out to the kitchen, she delivered her parting message,

"As I was just sayin' to Gumpsey, as is eatin' his dinner in the kitchen, him bein' too free with his knife to set in company, says I, 'Gumpsey, the minister has gone off his vittles, which is all along of his mopin' round the garden pokin' under the

snow with his stick, lookin' for bloom—as is well knowed, the crocus won't be showin' its head till time's past for sap runnin'. He's worritin' himself, too, over things as has nothin' to do with his sermons, such as layin' in books for idle folks to read, and encouragin' actin' out plays which he says eddicates people, the like of which goin's on would never have been stood for in my day.

"Worse still, he gets them makin' speeches to find out which way they should make their vote, not as it makes any difference, it bein' well knowed that the party as holds the reins is goin' to drive so long as it can hold the road!—be it Grit or Tory. There's no amount of loud speeches is goin' to make it slow up, but just go harder still, none knowin', not even the Prime Minister himself, where the country is goin', unless in the will of Providence they get pulled up in time.

"I heard tell as how the farmers were tryin' to lay hold of the lines, promisin' to jog along at a pace as would ease up the bumps, and keep shy of the holes!

"Well, maybe they *will*, and *maybe they won't!*

"But, mark my words, if *two parties* can't get along under one roof without so much back talk, there won't be much work done down to Ottawa when there's *three parties* settin' there contradictin' one another every time they open their mouths!

"But what I set out to say is, if only the minister had a good, sensible, settled-down body for his woman, as was near to his own age, he would be

more willin' to set at home and eat his vittles reg'lar, not botherin' over worldly things. To my mind, the folks should look after themselves of a week-day, the minister havin' his hands more than full of a Sunday tryin' to learn them enough religion to get them safe over the other six."

Poor John! What would he not have given to be able to put a quietus on his privileged housekeeper, but well he knew that to venture any remark would be to court disaster and cause a further flow of wisdom from her lips.

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Gumpsey, I'm sure you have my best interests at heart," said John, with outward calm, as, the dinner being over, he lost no time in conducting his guests to the study.

As they gathered round the great stove, Helen busied herself with some fine sewing, while Jean absently turned over the pages of a magazine, losing, however, no word of the conversation.

"Congratulations, John!" exclaimed Angus, "I declare I'm slow to introduce the subject. I needn't say I'm proud of the distinction which has come to my old friend," gripping his hand. "I'm enjoying the reflected glory, myself. When do you take up your duties at the university, old Don? I hate to see you leave us, John, but of course you naturally are elected to walk the heights," and Angus MacDonald's words rang true.

Jean looked up quickly, her expression displaying greater interest than she herself realized.

"We are so very proud of you, Mr. Matheson.

Angus always prophesied that some such distinction would be yours," announced Helen proudly.

Involuntarily, John Matheson's eyes sought those of Jean Sinclair. Were he to leave the ministry, and accept a position where the passing of the years but added to his recognized professional dignity and power, why could he not go honorably to her and tell her of his love?

One moment the temptation held him in its iron grip, for her fleeting presence in his lonely home was joy unspeakable. The next, with all the strength of his mature manhood, he turned it aside.

"I will do my duty! My work is where I am most needed. Regardless of all other considerations, at my Master's bidding, I go, or stay! So help me God," he breathed in silent prayer.

"Mr. Matheson's labor here has not been unfruitful, from what I can gather," and Jean smiled so sweetly and understandingly into his face, that John was suddenly deprived of all power to make a suitable reply. He rose quickly, and proposed that Angus and he take a short stroll down to the post-office for the noon mail.

"Can't we all go, Mr. Matheson," inquired Helen, rising. "Angus and I want to call on Mrs. Lindsay, and on the way back we must see the new community hall your church has built. Angus is working hard to awaken our people to the need for a social centre. You and Miss Sinclair could walk on to the post-office and meet us there. Come on, Jean, we'll put on our wraps—we don't need to

bother Mrs. Gumpsey to show us the spare room."

Poor John! Caught in a web of his own weaving, nothing remained for him but to consent. Soon they were out in the clear, bracing air. Angus and Helen turned at the first corner, leaving Jean and John Matheson to pursue their journey to the post-office alone.

For a moment they picked their steps over the drifted sidewalk in silence. John found himself, sorely against his better judgment, feasting his eyes on the face so near to his own, with the soul hunger of one who looks his last into the eyes of a loved one who is leaving to return no more.

"You don't seem particularly cheerful, Mr. Matheson," remarked Jean, at a loss to account for his silence. "I trust the responsibility of acting the part of 'mine host' has not upset your peace of mind. Possibly you prefer your magnificent isolation," suggested Jean with a rising blush of embarrassment. "Oh, please don't trouble to contradict or explain," she added hurriedly, as John essayed to correct her, his face alight with the winning smile, the power of which Jean recognized too well.

"I didn't tell you, Mr. Matheson," Jean resumed, "how glad I am for you—I mean," she added, "about the presidency. It will mean so much for you. I'm sure your happiness will now be assured—the city has many advantages to those who prefer it," and she purposely turned her face away in order to hide the confusion of her soul.

"Place and position do not assure happiness, Miss

Sinclair," he answered gently. "Why do you say that?" he questioned in a low voice, as he guided her gently over the drifted walk which bordered a bleak, storm-beswept waste.

And Jean, fearing lest she had betrayed the confidence of Angus and Helen, hesitated to reply, while John, emboldened by her apparent interest in his happiness, seized the opportunity to search into the hidden secrets of her heart.

"Miss Sinclair, I thank you more—yes, more than I dare ever express—for your interest in me. I should like to ask a great favor of you." He hesitated. "May I state a case to you? I am sorely in need of counsel, and I know you will give me your unbiased opinion," and John's voice was deep with suppressed feeling.

"I—I shall be very glad to help you in any way I can, but I'm afraid I can do but little," added Jean with humility, as she lowered her eyes from the earnest gaze which met hers.

"We have but a short time, so I won't go into details," said John.

"Oh, please do! I am devoted to details!" rejoined Jean, with an assumption of indifference, as she glanced brightly at him.

"Miss Sinclair—don't! I implore you—I am deeply in earnest—so help me!" and he removed his guiding hand from her arm.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean to hurt you! Forgive me—do—I—I—" and her eyes filled with tears of quick repentance.

"I have nothing to forgive, child," answered John tenderly and patiently as he might humor a whimsical, dearly-beloved child. "It is I who am to blame," he added, with a sigh.

"Do tell me now, won't you, Mr. Matheson? I would like to hear it—you know that, don't you?" pleaded Jean as, losing her footing upon the slippery walk, she would have fallen but for the timely support of John's strong arm.

"This road is unsafe, you must let me help you—"

"Please don't trouble, although it certainly is bumpy. I don't usually require to be personally conducted," explained Jean, endeavoring to introduce a less serious strain into the conversation.

"I find great pleasure in personally conducting you!"

"Thank you," replied Jean quietly; "but won't you tell it to me now?"

"The story which I want to tell you, and upon which I want your advice is this, Miss Sinclair," resumed John, after some moments spent in silence, broken but by the crunching of the snow beneath their feet.

"I know of a case where a minister loves a young woman very dearly—he would count it God-given happiness could he call her his wife."

"Yes," breathed Jean, inaudibly, as a cold hand gripped at her heartstrings, for was she now to hear the story of his own life's disappointment?

"While he loves her," continued John, "he realizes, from confidences which he has received from

her, that *her* happiness would not be promoted by marrying the minister of a country charge, such as he is proud to fill.

"He doesn't consider it would be honorable on his part to ask her to share the life of a minister, with its accompanying conditions, and also—" with a smothered sigh, "he is a man of mature years, and—and she—she, is a spring morning with all its sweet fragrance."

His eyes sought Jean's face, but she was looking far beyond at the storm-swept roads.

"Dare he—would it be kinder to her if he were to withdraw from her life, and bury his undying secret within his own breast? Tell me what you think?" he requested anxiously, his face bent to receive her answer.

"Yes, I'll tell you, Mr. Matheson," replied Jean in a clear voice, and withdrawing her arm. "But, I must first ask you a question, which, if answered truthfully, should prove the key to the whole situation—Does this young woman of whom you speak love the minister?" she asked in a low, measured tone.

John was ill prepared for this question, which took him by surprise and discovered the weak spot in his armor.

"Love him!—God help me! I don't know—there is no reason why she should—that is—"

"Because, if she did, no other consideration would count," stated Jean with quiet emphasis.

"Miss Sinclair, listen to me! Do you mean that?"

"Dare he, knowing all the circumstances, attempt to induce her to be his wife—would it be fair to her?" and the great, loving heart almost ceased to beat as he listened for her answer.

"I only know," replied Jean, after a moment's tense silence, "that if I were in her place I would like to be induced," and Jean's voice died away in a whisper.

"You would *like* to be induced! Did I understand you aright?" the temptation to pour out his soul's secret fast over-powering him.

"I think I would—yes, I'm sure I would—that is, if I were in her place. But then you see, I wouldn't be, for nobody would ever like me enough for that," and she glanced up at John, bravely endeavoring to smile, though her eyes were dark and pathetic from the effort to keep back the unbidden tears.

John's face grew very pale. For a passing moment he saw nothing in heaven or earth but the soft, caressing eyes with the childlike expression looking up into his own, then, pulling himself together with a supreme effort, he answered in grave, measured tones,

"Thank you for listening to my story, Miss Sinclair."

"Don't speak of it, Mr. Matheson," she replied, with a sudden indifference of manner, fearing lest she had betrayed her secret. "Any time you have another such delicate and interesting problem to discuss, I shall be only too glad to have you pour out your confidence to me."

"Thank you," he said, taking her little hand momentarily in his and looking tenderly down upon her. "I will remember—I could never forget!"

. . . . . .

Angus and Helen had reached the manse first, and already the horse was at the door.

"I'm sorry to have to hurry away like this, old man, but I have an appointment to meet, and it will take every minute to reach there in time—the road is full of pitch-holes. I'll be over in a day or two to look over your plant here and to have a chat," said Angus in explanation of their early departure.

Gently, and carefully, John Matheson tucked the great robe round the little form that was so dear to him, and as he stood waving his cap in farewell, his handsome, manly face and form in bold relief, Jean's heart rejoiced within her.

Could it be that—perhaps—perhaps—and she snuggled down happily to enjoy her homeward drive, it being an established fact that "Love can hope where reason would despair."

John turned back to his lonely manse—doubly so now, and yet infinitely more dear to him because Jean Sinclair had spent a few hours under its roof.

"I must not—no, for her sweet sake I *dare* not attempt to win her love. Knowing what she told me of her past life, how could I ask her to be the wife of a minister—one, moreover, whose hair is already streaked with grey?

"How sweetly she looked at me when she said that nobody would ever love her enough for that!

Poor, lonely, little child! For she is little more to me," he added with a sigh.

"If it had not been on the street, I do not believe that any power in heaven or earth would have kept me from gathering her into my arms. After all," he mused, happy in his day-dream, "what difference would a few years make in our ages?

"My love is undying—eternal—bounded by neither time nor space. . . . ."

But alas! As he returned to the manse, his pleasant reverie was rudely disturbed by the dulcet tones of his ever vigilant housekeeper.

"Well, to be sure, I did enjoy the folks' visit! I never was so took off my feet by any one before—which is the plain truth—as I was with the sweet young girl with the great begging eyes like poor Rover as was killed on the train track comin' home from the berry patch. She don't look a day over sixteen, she don't, which would have been a fittin' age for your own child, Mr. Matheson, if it had been so willed by Providence as you was to have had a wee lamb of your own to raise up," and the faithful Gumpsey heaved a dismal sigh.

"That reminds me, I must go this minute and see if Gumpsey is settin' round idlin' his time. . . ."

Groaning in his soul, John watched her depart.

"The spirit of his dream" was changed, and hope had ceased to chant to him her melodies.

Chapter XX

JEAN LEAVES BLOOMFIELD MANSE

"Hope for a season bade the world farewell!"

UPON arriving home, after a long drive over the heavy road which was literally mined with deeply-gashed pitch-holes, causing the occupants of the cutter some anxiety lest they be suddenly precipitated into a snow bank, Jean found an unexpected message awaiting her.

Her Aunt Laura with whom she made her home, had suddenly failed in health, and the doctor, realizing that nothing but change of scene would benefit her, had prescribed an ocean voyage and a prolonged sojourn in the south of France.

She was anxious to have Jean, her favorite niece, accompany her, and it was absolutely necessary that they start immediately, as the ship sailed for Liverpool on the second day following.

Jean's sensations, when able to grasp the import of her Aunt's letter, were those of commingled joy and sorrow. Joy, at the wonderful prospect ahead, of beholding with her own eyes the great land beyond the sea, where many whose undying names were inscribed high on the roll of fame had labored unceasingly and ofttimes without appreciation, that they might enrich the literature, art, and

science of the world! And sorrow, because for some inexplicable reason she was loath to leave Bloomfield. To be sure, she was not absolutely essential to Helen's happiness, nor yet to any one else's for that matter, unless it might be Aunt Laura's, she told herself, with a little, stifled sigh.

She would not be able to see Mr. Matheson again, and something in the way in which he had looked down upon her as he bade her good-bye, and tucked the warm robes about her, had given promise of further meetings. "Oh, well! It is all for the best, I suppose. The next time we meet, he will be established as President of Harton University, and doubtless he will introduce his wife to me—the woman who would not marry him while he was a country minister! But why should I concern myself with his matrimonial affairs? From this day forward, I do solemnly promise—as much as lies in me—to think of him no more—to banish this—this obsession from my mind. And, hereunto, I place my hand and seal—that is, I would do so, only that I never believe in expressing my sentiments upon paper; written documents of that kind being so likely to fall into the hands of the curious minded and unsympathetic, and to confront one at a time when the party of the first part would most wish to forget their existence!"

Preparations went on apace for Jean's departure, Helen rejoicing over the prospect of the trip which Jean was to enjoy, and making her promise that,

immediately upon her return, she would pay them a more prolonged visit at Bloomfield manse.

Dr. Rolston, happening in, heard with regret the unexpected news, and placed his services at Jean's disposal should she require any further assistance to speed her departure. A hurried call, however, interfered with his good intentions and cut short his farewell.

As he was fastening his heavy, coonskin driving coat, Jean, with nervous temerity, seized a moment when Helen and Angus were engaged with a caller to introduce the subject which had never been mentioned between them since the night when Jean had discovered to her surprise that Bessie Grayson was the woman whom Dr. Rolston loved.

"Dr. Rolston," she ventured in a low voice, after some hesitation, "would you mind—would it be all right if I told Bessie that I had met you, and—and would you care to be remembered to her?"

"I have no objection, Miss Sinclair," answered the doctor with a sudden accession of dignity," but I have no reason to believe that Miss Grayson will have any interest in me. Possibly, she may not even remember me."

"Bessie Grayson is not a girl like that—she is good and true, and never forgets a friend, nor a kindness shown her. But, of course, I won't mention your name to her if you do not wish it," and Jean's head was lifted indignantly.

"Miss Sinclair," and the doctor fixed his eyes steadily and unflinchingly upon her as he answered

in a suppressed tone, "I wish it of all things if—if I thought Miss Grayson would value my friendship.

"Now that's better—that sounds so much more like yourself, Doctor," responded Jean smiling brightly, with that quick change of moods that was one of her chief charms. "You will allow me to use my own judgment, won't you? I promise to use very great discretion, and to await the psychological moment before introducing my subject. So now, good-bye! We won't shake hands again for that would be sure to bring bad luck, which at this stage would never, *never* do!" she finished, in a tragic tone.

"I'll be very careful not to reveal his secret," Jean assured herself as she watched the doctor's departing figure. "How dearly he loves Bessie! Isn't it the queerest thing that nobody cares for me in that way—that is of course, nobody whom I could care for!—" then, with a little, smothered sigh, "I wonder, will Mr. Matheson be sorry to hear that I've gone? No! I wonder nothing of the kind. Why should he be sorry? I vowed a solemn vow that I would not let my mind revert to him again—*nor will I!*" she concluded with sudden determination, as she ran lightly up the stairway to put the finishing touches to her packing.

The next morning found Angus and Helen with their guest, awaiting the arrival of the early-morning train.

"Good-bye, Helen dear," said Jean tenderly, folding her in a loving embrace. "I have had such

a lovely visit. You've both been so good to me. Angus, I can never live sufficiently long to atone for having attempted to dissuade Helen from—from what I considered a mad course, in marrying a minister! To my credit be it known, however, that once having met you, I never attempted to lay a stone in your pathway. You believe that, Angus, say you do!" she pleaded, extending her hand in farewell, "otherwise, I could never, *never* survive my mortification."

"In order to procure absolution, you shall require to pay us another visit at your very earliest opportunity, Jean," replied Angus, laughingly, as he assisted her on board the train.

"That's good of you, Angus," said Jean, with a sigh of relief. "Not only do you hold out a prospect of forgiveness, but open your hospitable door to me once more. I'll certainly come—thank you both so very much. Yes, just as soon as I return, Helen. Say good-bye," she added as an afterthought, "to any one who might be interested in my departure. Don't forget little Billy and his mother, and—and Mr. Matheson," and, wiping away the lonely tears which welled up unbidden into the dark eyes and threatened to overflow, she was gone.

On the following morning John Matheson heard the news of Jean's departure from Dr. Rolston, as their cutters passed with difficulty on the storm-drifted road.

"So, she is gone!" reflected John, his heart heavy within him.

A quick gust of wind caught up the loose snow, and whirling it madly in front of him, shut off his view of the white, winding road ahead.

"Of course, it was inevitable that she should go!" he concluded, "but I must be honest with myself—I can no longer close my eyes to the truth—my happiness has gone with her."

Even as he spoke, a sudden blast caught a lofty elm in its might grip and bowed its proud strength to the earth.

"I had hoped," he continued, "that for some strange and unaccountable reason she had learned to—to have an interest in me. It is better to have ended in this way however,—there really is no other way—" and taking a tight grip of the lines, he held his horse steadily to the unbroken road ahead.

"She is gone!" He sighed deeply. "I may never see her again, but I will cherish her beloved memory always. She will be to me as a dear one who has gone on before and is for ever beyond my earthly reach. I could not honorably ask Jean Sinclair to be my wife—the wife of a man whose years will soon place him where his services as a minister to the average congregation will not be in demand!

"In the professions of medicine and law, or in the realm of scientific research, knowledge and experience, gained through the passing of the years, count for much—not so in the ministry!

"Even—even if she could have learned to care for me—I cannot think it would be right to accept the sacrifice!" he continued, as his mind reverted to the

pitiable story which Jean Sinclair had confided to him.

"Poor child!" he reflected sadly, "it was enough that she should see her father's usefulness interfered with and his life broken, through the lamentable conditions which govern the filling of vacancies in our Church. Would to God!" he added, wearily, "there were some other way than that of placing a minister of the Gospel up before a critical, and oft-times a gainsaying people, while he opens unto them the Scriptures—even as a salesman might be required to display his merchandise before a would-be purchaser!

"Surely, at this late day in the history of our Church, some mode of procedure could be planned, which would not require a man, who has been solemnly set apart to the office of the ministry, through the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, to be thus humiliated!"

For a long time John Matheson drove on in unbroken silence, save for the plunging of the horse's feet in the heavily crusted snow, or the creaking of the trees as the wind swept through their naked branches.

"I have decided not to accept the presidency of Harton University," he resumed, more calmly. "I believe my duty calls me to remain here, and minister as best I may to these people. I appreciate deeply the honor that has been conferred upon me, but I cannot consider it, although it would make clear the way for me to ask Jean Sinclair to be my

wife. Were I to do so—I would be attempting to buy happiness at the cost of deserting my post of duty."

Suddenly the grey laden clouds were lifted, the sun beamed forth resplendently and the long, white road ahead was clothed in fleeting gold.

"My happiness," he added, his face alight with the peace and joy which this world can neither give nor take away, "will be found in telling the old, old story of Christ's love for men, and of the abundant life which follows upon loving service rendered to others. If I can only teach my people that by a practical demonstration of truth and love we can have Christ's Kingdom come right here in Beresford, I shall be well content."

Of course, he well knew that he could never forget Jean Sinclair. The childlike expression of her eyes, and the appealing touch of her hand upon his arm, would remain his most vivid impression until the sands of life were run.

"God grant that she may be happy—that some one more worthy of her may win her love," he breathed in silent prayer. "I—I have my work—" and turning his horse into a nearby lane, he was soon at the bedside of one whose eyes were fast closing upon the joys and sorrows of this world, and who was awaiting God's servant to speed him on his long journey.

Chapter XXI

THE DESECRATION OF THE BLUE ROOM

"I cannot but remember such things were."

THE Christmas season, with its peace and blessedness, passed as a benediction over the quiet village and countryside of Bloomfield.

No spirit of commercialism had as yet been introduced into the life of its well-content, God-fearing people, who rejoiced over the birth of a Saviour "which was to save His people from their sins."

Nor had they burdened themselves with promiscuous gift-giving and the labor thus entailed, which might serve to veil from their spiritual eyesight the real significance of the day.

Christmas was spent quietly and happily in the old, stone manse, and a spirit of peace and thankfulness filled the hearts of Angus and Helen MacDonald, as they sat down to the first Christmas dinner in their own home.

During the months which Helen had spent in Bloomfield her husband's people had learned to know her worth and to love her very dearly. Notwithstanding the fact that she, herself, was sensible of her shortcomings and had a realizing sense of her limitations, the congregation knew that the

heart of their minister's wife was pure gold, and were charitable in their judgment for they already appreciated her. Many a motherly soul, thinking of her own daughter, far from the sheltering roof-tree, found in her heart a warm, protecting love for the young wife of their pastor, who in some manner unknown to themselves, had discovered the secret chamber of their affections.

Dear Mrs. Jones, of the purple bonnet strings, had proven a veritable tower of strength to Helen in her hour of need.

When she realized that the minister's young wife, asked at a moment's notice to lead in prayer, was about to be overcome by nervous confusion, she had on occasion stepped boldly into the breach and suggested the singing of a hymn, after which they would all unite in prayer.

On one occasion her help proved most timely, and humbly did Helen bow before her in a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness.

Miss Anne Bacon, a zealous soul, and one possessed of an enquiring mind and a spirit of research, raised the question at one of the meetings as to whether a certain Scripture text was to be found in Zephaniah or Haggai.

"Doubtless our minister's wife will be able to throw some light on the subject," she suggested, confidently sitting back in expectancy, her notebook open ready to mark down exact chapter and verse.

Before Helen had an opportunity to display her lack of knowledge on the question, dear Mrs. Jones,

with beaming good nature written all over her kindly face, was quick to the rescue.

"A meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society to do work for the church, is no place for questions of that kind, Anne. Go home and hunt up the verse for yourself—you have more time than the minister's wife! Why can't you be contented with scripture you can lay your hand on, and which don't need a Bible professor to explain or locate for you? There are plenty of good, every-day chapters, that will do you just as much good! I declare, Anne Bacon, I'm a great deal older than you, and I've never got as far as those books yet—and I don't expect I ever will, for when I finish reading the sermon which our dear Lord preached, filled and running over with charity for saint and sinner alike, somehow, I just want to start it all over again," she concluded, her kindly smile embracing all present as she readjusted her bonnet strings of royal hue, and proceeded with the meeting.

It was a widely recognized fact that the manse door was ever open and the table spread, a sincere welcome awaiting rich and poor alike, for under its hospitable roof all men were equal.

It was a Sunday evening late in May. The air was warm and balmy, and filled with the fragrance of the purple-hued lilacs which bordered either side of the walk leading to the church.

The minister's sermon was drawing to a close when the door opened softly and a man stole quietly in and took his seat in a pew at the rear of the church.

The contour of his face, his high, intelligent forehead, sensitive mouth, and the quick glance of appreciation which he flashed upon the minister as he recognized some literary reference, bespoke a natural refinement, and displayed the earmarks of an education which years of dissipation had failed to obliterate.

Little was known of him by the people of the village. Ten years had passed away since, a stranger, he had come quietly into their midst and taken a small house on an outlying street, where he still lived in comparative isolation. He had never associated in any way with the Bloomfield people, and when Mr. MacDonald, as minister, knocked at his door, he gained no admittance.

It was well known that Joe Belton, as he was called, drank heavily but never in public.

The post-mistress was responsible for the information that "he received more letters than all the folks of the village put together—not counting the minister—that sometimes he came in himself and sent away rolls of his own handwriting, getting back letters with money in them, which was more's the pity, as he only washed it down his throat, it being a mercy he had no woman looking to him for her keep, although if he'd got the right one who knows but she might have kept him straight? Anyway, he knows how to treat women folk civil, even when he has something in him, which is more than others know that are as dry as a pine stump in dog days!"

Thus did she conclude, as her mind reverted to occasional business transactions with Joe Belton, and his cultured, deferential manner of addressing her.

As the congregation rose to sing the last hymn, a dull thud was heard, and poor Joe Belton had fallen to the floor.

Quickly Dr. Rolston, who was sitting nearby, went to his assistance, and with the help of others placed him in a recumbent position on the hard, wooden seat.

The minister immediately suggested that he should be carried into the manse, next door. Dr. Rolston hesitated, but both Angus and Helen insisted upon it, and soon kindly hands bore him out through the avenue of sweet-scented lilacs, into the minister's house and up the broad stairway, which led to the sacred precincts of the blue-and-white guest chamber.

Helen with her own hands turned back the snow-white sheets and the pretty silk comforter and rearranged the great, soft pillows, so imposing in their spotless covers of white, embroidered linen.

"This is nothing short of desecration," protested Dr. Rolston, indignantly; but Helen, taking no notice, was already on her way to the kitchen to prepare a soothing drink for the patient.

All through the night Angus MacDonald watched at the bedside of this poor derelict of humanity. Towards morning he awoke to consciousness, and

great was his confusion upon realizing his surroundings.

"I should not have been permitted to intrude upon you in this way," he apologized. "It's only an attack to which I am frequently subject. I regret this more than I can express," he moaned. "Allow me to make preparations to leave, Mr. MacDonald."

Helen, entering, heard the request. "Oh, Mr. Belton, you must have some nice strong coffee and a piece of toast before you go. I have them nearly ready. I'll just go down for them now."

"You are too kind," murmured he, as he sank wearily back on the pillow, his closed eyes shutting out the vision of the spotless room with all its dainty appointments.

Before long Helen was back with a tempting breakfast, but all remained untouched with the exception of the coffee.

"I can never repay your kindness, Mrs. MacDonald. I should not have been brought into this room. It—it takes me back to other days when—before the drink curse robbed me of my manhood," and an expression of anguish passed over his face, as he turned his gaze away from the minister and his wife.

"Why don't you try again, Mr. Belton," pleaded Helen in a tone of sweetest sympathy, laying her soft hand compassionately upon his forehead.

As she did so, some secret chord of his being was touched, new life flowed through his veins, his

strength of purpose returned, and his will-power was created anew.

The kindly, sympathetic touch of Helen's hand carried him far back to the days when, as a child and growing boy, and later on as a student at law, his mother would steal quietly in after he had laid his head on his pillow, and pass her hand gently over his brow in loving caress.

"Mrs. MacDonald, this is not our last meeting. You will see me again—I trust, under different circumstances," and the determined expression of his eyes and voice carried conviction, as he bent low over Helen's hand in farewell.

"No, thank you, Mr. MacDonald, I'm quite able to go alone. I am deeply indebted to you. I will not forget it!"

That night the little, old house on the outlying street was deserted, for Belton had gathered together a few treasures in a worn, leather bag, and had taken the evening train for Montreal. His possessions were few. A couple of photographs—one, an elderly, sweet-faced woman, looking proudly up at a tall young man, wearing his graduation cap and gown. . . . another, that of a young woman with softly curling hair and large, appealing eyes, holding by the hand a little toddler of about three summers, the same young man, grown older, standing by her side, his face alight with love and the pride of life.

A Bible, with the text: "ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established," inscribed

in his mother's faded handwriting, was counted among his treasures.

These, with a few well-thumbed volumes treating of science, law and philosophy, comprised the greater part of the contents of the old grip, as Joe Belton turned his face away from the village, where for so many years he had been set at naught of all men on account of the degradation to which drink had reduced him.

. . . . . .

The woman who usually did the laundry work at the manse, had refused, when sent for, to "wash bed-clothes after that low-down, drinking dog," as she described poor Joe Belton, with all the poetic force of alliteration, added to strength of expression and denunciation.

"I couldn't bring myself to it—I really couldn't, Mrs. MacDonald! I'm a hardworking, respectable woman, but I'm particular the folks I wash for. I'm sorry—for I'd like to do you a good turn, and if it was only for you and the minister you wanted me to wash I'd wear my fingers to the bone—that I would—I would indeed! I don't know of anybody else you could get in right away, but if you can wait until next week, Eliza Soaper might have a day to spare!"

This latter suggestion did not appeal to Helen, so no other course remained but to strip the spare room of all its dainty appointments, including blankets, bedspread and coverlet, and proceed to wash them herself.

Angus came bravely to the rescue, and proved himself capable of domestic exploits the like of which he had never dreamed himself able to accomplish in his carefree, bachelor days.

"It was too bad to make such a mess of things as this, Helen," commiserated Angus, as he took the end of an unwieldy double blanket and bade his wife sit down and rest, as this was the very exercise he required to develop his muscle and keep him in good condition.

"Oh, well, Angus," answered Helen, as she sank very wearily into a nearby chair, "it was only the right thing to do. I don't mind in the least if it helps the poor fellow. I was so sorry for him and really, he did look and speak when he went away as though he meant to start all over again and do better."

"Poor chap!" said Angus, sympathetically, "he's made a bad muddle of things. He evidently has enjoyed every advantage which birth and education can give! I say!" with a sudden change of manner, "where do you hang this wash? And, by the way, when is that 'strong, capable and willing girl' going to appear on the kitchen horizon? I thought she was to have been here a couple of weeks ago at the very latest," and Angus glanced anxiously at Helen, whom he thought looked tired and worn.

"Yes, she was to have come last Monday, but a cousin's wife was taken suddenly ill—at least, I think it was a cousin's wife—I'm not just clear," said Helen, as she tried to help Angus shake the heavy blankets. "During my short experience in

housekeeping I have already observed that domestics are invariably blessed with a wide connection of relatives, who seem to be in a chronic state of illness, and require the services of the said domestic in season and out of season," she explained, with a momentary return of her old vivacity.

"Well, I'm going for this one immediately after dinner, and shall attempt to tear her away from the bosom of her much afflicted family," announced Angus, firmly and with grim determination, as he wrestled with the heavy, rebellious bedspread.

"I'm afraid I shall have to lie down a while, Angus," Helen faltered. "I'm so sorry! However can you manage? That—that———"

She attempted to rise, but her face grew suddenly white and she sank down helplessly as everything grew dark before her eyes.

"What is it, dear? This has been too much for you! Let me lift you up—take a little of this water," and forcing a few drops between her lips, he coaxed her back to consciousness.

Then, gathering her into his strong arms, he carried her into the living-room and placed her tenderly on the great soft couch.

Chapter XXII

A NEW VOICE

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy."

THAT night, the old, old conflict between life and death was fought out in Bloomfield manse.

Kindly neighbors tiptoed softly through the deserted rooms, pausing in heart-wrung sympathy before the closed door of the study, for the Minister's young wife was far, far down the Valley of the Shadow.

Peace Perkins of the few words, but as Helen had long since realized, of the kindly deeds, had stolen quietly into the manse in the hour of extremity and had taken upon her shoulders all domestic responsibility.

The interminable hours dragged out their weary length, and Angus MacDonald prayed, as men pray when all human avenues of assistance are closed, and they are thrown back upon the strong arm of God for help and succour.

"O God, spare her to me!" he breathed, in an agony of supplication. "She is so young—spare my wife to me!"

As though in answer to his prayer, a song sparrow at the casement lifted his little voice in full-throated

melody. Immediately he was joined by an invisible choir of feathered songsters, until the air became vocal with music and a pæan of praise and sweetest thanksgiving was lifted heavenward.

Suddenly, a strange new note, which caused Angus MacDonald to leap to his feet, was added to the chorus, and a little child,—"trailing clouds of glory" in his wake, had added the sweet tone of his feeble voice to the music of the spheres.

Oh, the blessedness of joy after anguish and suspense!

As Dr. Rolston entered the study and wrung the minister's hand in heartiest congratulation, Angus MacDonald's heart swelled with thanksgiving and gratitude to God, that the hour of agony was over, and that his wife, whose feet had well-nigh laid hold upon the streets of gold, was spared to walk further with him along life's pathway.

He opened the door which led out into the garden, and, with bared head, walked forth into the newly created glory of the May morning.

The air was sweet with the fragrance of spring. The heavily-laden lilac bushes leaned their purple clusters towards him; the snowballs and syringa spread forth their white luxuriance in his pathway, and in the purity and sacredness of early morn all nature seemed to rejoice with him.

Some hours afterwards Angus MacDonald entered his wife's room, treading softly and reverently, as though on holy ground, and as he caught a glimpse of the white, still face on the pillow, the

deep, blue eyes yet retaining the far-away expression of one who had glimpsed inside the pearly gates, he stood—speechless, overwhelmed with emotion.

"The baby," breathed Helen, as her husband bent over her in loving solicitude, "he is like you—I am so glad—it would never, *never* do for him to have —my nose—would it, Angus dear? It's not—not Roman enough. . . ." and her voice trailed off to a faint whisper.

Before Angus could recover himself sufficiently to answer, he was summarily despatched to the next room, the nurse having decreed that Mrs. MacDonald must be kept perfectly quiet and not allowed on any account to exert herself.

As Helen grew stronger, many were the kindly-disposed folk who called to see the minister's wife and the new baby, and to lay their offerings at his untried feet.

Thirteen woollen coats, and a sufficient number of bootees to last him until he entered into the dignity of long trousers, were showered upon him, for this was the first man child born in the old Bloomfield manse, and all honor should be his.

One of the first to call was Mrs. Sadden, a worthy and well-meaning individual, whose habit of seeing lions in the way, and of retailing harrowing details regarding the fatal illnesses of her relatives, each of whom had apparently met a tragic end, rendered her undesirable as a dispenser of cheer in a sick room.

"So this is the minister's baby! I will just take

him in my own arms a minute, so I can feel if he has any curvatures or twisted joints that the doctor has overlooked."

Poor Helen grew sick with an unthinkable fear as Mrs. Sadden, feeling the little limbs up and down, continued.

"Have you passed a candle before him, to see if his sight is all right, Mrs. MacDonald? John Sadden's first wife's baby was as blind as a bat from the day he was born, and its folks never knew it for a year, and although I wouldn't want to frighten you, its eyes blinked just like your baby's do!"

"Oh, Mrs. Sadden," implored Helen, in an agonized tone, "don't say that—please don't! Where is Mr. MacDonald? Angus! Angus!" she called, as loudly as her weakness would permit.

"You mustn't excite yourself, Mrs. MacDonald. We will hope for the best, but if it is so willed that your child should be blind, why, you will just have to bear your cross, and shoulder your burden the same as other folks, minister's wife or no minister's wife."

"Oh, Mrs. Sadden, don't! don't!" protested Helen weakly, her fever rising rapidly. "I could never."

"You really must compose yourself, Mrs. MacDonald, and not give way to your feelings like that. Perhaps you'd rest better if you had the baby," and Helen, grasping him, pressed him so tightly to her heart that he lifted up his little voice in high-pitched protest.

"Now, keep perfectly quiet, do! There was my

brother Thomas' wife; she let herself get all fevered up, too, it coming on the same as yours just while I was sitting at her bedside. She died on the tenth day, leaving a little, weakly, puling baby alone in the world, with no mother to look after it! Your fever is rising, Mrs. MacDonald—any one can see that without looking," she added in a matter-of-fact tone. "Thomas' wife. . . ."

"Would you please call my husband?" asked Helen weakly.

"I will, if you insist upon it, but anything you want done for you, I can do—and let the minister have a little rest. He's failing every day—any one can tell that with only half an eye! He looks just like my oldest brother, John James, when he first started on the decline, running downhill as fast as an empty wheel-barrow, none being able to stop him, although he swallowed a fine horse and cow in doctor's medicine—" she said, heaving a great sigh as she recalled the triple loss!

"Angus! Angus!—Peace!—come—"

Hearing their names called in such an agonized tone, both hastened to her room.

One glance, and Peace had run quickly across the street, where she had noticed the doctor's horse tied to a hitching post.

Mrs. Sadden was ready with an explanation immediately.

"She has taken a spell, Mr. MacDonald. They do at times. Jane Simpkins took one and never came out of it. . . ."

"For God's sake, woman, be quiet!" commanded Angus, as a realizing sense of what Helen had been called upon to endure was brought home to him. "Leave me alone with my wife. . . ."

But almost before Mrs. Sadden could remove her offended presence, the doctor arrived and restoratives were administered.

Upon regaining consciousness, Helen insisted that the light be passed time and again before the poor little, blinking eyes of the baby, and it was not until the doctor had assured her many times over that its sight was perfect, and that her husband was hale and hearty—his condition calling for no concern whatever, that she sank into a troubled sleep, and dreamed that her child would never open its eyes to the beauty and sweetness of a lilac scented May morning.

Chapter XXIII

IN JOHN MATHESON'S GARDEN

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may."

THE manse baby grew and waxed strong and hearty, notwithstanding the thirteen coats and the heavy responsibility of having been born a minister's son.

Doubtless, a realizing sense of the latter, accounted for the occasional wails which were wrung from his unsophisticated little heart, as he reflected upon the dignity of his position, and regretted his unfitness for his high estate and calling.

The naming of the small new-comer was fraught with difficulty, and gave rise to much controversy. Many in the congregation felt that they should be consulted upon so vital a question as the naming of the first man child born in the old manse.

"Of course you will call him John Knox," suggested one zealous soul, his tone breathing finality.

"Well, I hadn't considered doing so," admitted Angus.

"No name could be more fitting," urged the other, "I believe in giving a child something to live up to when you're naming him! Some of us have decided —providing you raise no objection—that he shall be baptised John Knox MacDonald!"

Angus, keeping his own counsel, answered not at all. He hastened home to consult with Helen, doubting very much if she would care to accept the ruling of either the whole, or part of the congregation in this particular matter.

"Well, Helen, have you thought of any other names for the baby? What about John Knox?"

"John Knox! You don't mean it, Angus! What ever suggested such an extraordinary idea? Listen, Angus! Look at me. Note well my general appearance and bearing—now, be strictly truthful! Could you ever, by the wildest and most elastic stretch of your imagination, conceive of me as being the mother of a John Knox? Consider well your answer!"

"*Never*, Helen! *Never!*" answered Angus, with solemn emphasis.

"You speak with great sincerity and your manner of address carries with it conviction. I shall look into the life and character of the late Mrs. Knox—doubtless she had many virtues which I might strive to emulate. I feel I shall require them all to raise up Angus, number two, in the way he should go!"

"What! you aren't thinking of naming him after me, Helen?" protested Angus weakly.

"And who worthier? As you well know, I would be the last to fail in admiration and veneration for John Knox, but when it comes down to daily living, I must confess with much shamefacedness that of the two—John Knox or Angus MacDonald—

I should feel much more comfortable and at home with the latter," and Helen smiled up at Angus, well content."

"That is because your spiritual appetite is lacking," argued Angus bravely, his eyes casting no reproach.

"Not necessarily so, my dear! You know I adore heroes and reformers—always providing, of course, that they do not attempt to reform me—but, to be strictly truthful, I'm not at all sure that I would pine to live under the same roof with one! I imagine it might take a liberal supply of grace upon my part, and at times—the occasions being rare and isolated—it is just possible that I might run short."

"Helen, you are the most unknowable person! You are forever surprising me by the remarkable attitude of mind you display."

" 'Age cannot wither me, nor custom stale my infinite variety'," quoted his wife laughingly. "Do let me help you, Angus! you're really striving to be complimentary, but your Celtic origin holds you back from full and free expression. Well, I must go and see if my noble Scot has decided to renounce the bottle for the time being," and Helen ran lightly up the stairs.

Soon her voice was wafted down to Angus in tenderest baby talk.

"No! him shan't be called John Knox, so him shan't! Mother's own innocent, little lamb—him shall be called after hims own dear, dear

daddy, who is—let mother whisper it in him's sweet, little pink ear—nicer than John Knox, Calvin and all the law and the prophets put together, isn't him, mother's own, precious son?"

And Angus, number two, glanced up from his bottle with red eyes and a dazed expression, and nodded his head in silent acquiescence.

Only once had John Matheson visited Bloomfield manse since Jean's departure, and that was to pay his respects to the son and heir, and to offer his congratulations, but notwithstanding that Helen and Angus urged him to stay and take tea with them he refused their kind invitation and turned his face steadfastly towards his lonely manse.

The tulips in his garden flaunted their red and yellow splendor before his eyes—the early roses, blooming profusely and nothing abashed, lifted to him their rosy faces for their accustomed admiration, but John Matheson walked up and down his lonely garden, his unseeing eyes holden to their beauty.

"It do beat all, it do, what has come over the minister," Gumpsey was apt to exclaim, impatiently. "Him, as used to watch for the first tulip to poke up its head, and act as tender like to that white rosebush as if it had been his own flesh and blood! Now he goes mopin' around, takin' no thought for flowers nor weeds—which is well knowed I would never stand for weeds growin' in the minister's garden. As I said before, and I say it again, if it wasn't as I knowed for sure he'd read all about Jezebel and the likes of her in the Bible,

and could not be easy took in by them, I'd say there was a woman at the bottom of it—which is indeed a thorn in the flesh and given man to buffet him," and Gumpsey sighed, feelingly, as he proceeded, slowly and with deliberation, to tie up the minister's favorite, white rose bush.

The summer drowsed slowly away, and early September spread its haze of contentment over the fruitful countryside.

John Matheson was sitting in his study, a volume of Parkman's in his hand, but his gaze had wandered away from the page, out upon the far-away blue hills that towered aloft in the distance.

" 'Forever—never! Never—forever!' "

The old refrain haunted him. "Spring—summer! Autumn—winter! In endless unbroken succession. . . .

"The ancient sages affirmed that 'love of life increased with years'," he recalled. "Possibly, under some circumstances that might be true," he decided with an air of resignation, as he rose to go out into the garden. "This will never do! I'll go out and see what Gumpsey is doing.

"Yes, Gumpsey,"—that individual coming forward to greet him, "you have done well. I never saw the garden in better condition at this time of the year! Those late roses are particularly fine. You might gather them to-morrow morning—I want to take them to Mrs. Bone, who is ill."

The faithful Gumpsey did not hear distinctly,

but sufficiently well to realize that danger threatened his favorite roses.

"That's the minister every time, always strippin' the garden and sendin' the best off the place afore he has as much as cast an eye on them himself," complained Gumpsey.

John Matheson walked bareheaded to the gate in the warm September sunshine, the outlines of his thoughtful, scholarly face set forth in bold relief. His heavy brown hair, slightly sprinkled with grey, waving away from his brow, displayed a high, intelligent forehead and deeply-set, far-seeing eyes, which beamed forth goodness and truth.

"It beats me out why the minister can't get a woman, it do, indeed," declared Gumpsey to himself as he leaned upon his hoe, his eyes resting upon the well-built figure and the handsome, distinguished face of John Matheson. "He's no more that forty if he's a day, and straight as a ramrod, but somehow he don't seem to have the right bait to catch women folk with. Well, perhaps he has chose the better part," concluded Gumpsey, philosophically, as he rubbed some black tobacco with one fist in the palm of the other hand, preparatory to lighting a pipe of uncertain age and time-honored appearance.

"It's gospel truth, it is, that there's many a man has spoke for a woman at night, when the harvest moon was shinin' down, and his wits got all dazed, as would get out of it next morning by sun-up, if he could, or my name's not Gumpsey, which it is!" and

he slapped his knee with a vigor which sent the dust flying in all directions and bespoke a personal knowledge of the subject.

Suddenly Dr. Rolston's buggy turned the corner of the road which passed by the manse, but until the horse had been, with some difficulty, pulled up at the gate John Matheson did not recognize the young lady who sat by the doctor's side.

"Good-morning, Mr. Matheson! Nice of you to receive us in this formal manner! Excuse me for not taking my hands off the lines—this is a strange horse and rather restless. You remember Miss Sinclair of course—Mrs. MacDonald's friend."

Remember her!

John's heart stood still, and for one brief second he vouchsafed no reply.

"Evidently, he does not," replied Jean, slightly piqued. "Won't you please introduce us, Dr. Rolston? This is most embarrassing."

Mastering himself with an effort, John spoke slowly and with difficulty. "That is not at all necessary, Miss Sinclair. I—I was taken by surprise. I remember you well!" and Jean's eyes dropped before the unmistakable light of welcome in his gaze.

"That is kind of you, Mr. Matheson. I hardly hoped that you would; time and distance are such powerful aids to forgetfulness."

Honest John Matheson answered not at all, but the morning stars sang together and the years fell away from him as a garment, as he lifted his eyes

to the bright young face looking down upon him, and Jean knew well that her memory still lived.

"I think Miss Sinclair had better stay here until I return. This horse is rather unmanageable, and unfortunately I have to pass the crossing where the trains are shunting up and down."

"By all means, Dr. Rolston. I would count it a pleasure," replied John with unstrained hospitality.

"Are you sure I shall not be intruding upon you, Mr. Matheson?"

"You can't do that, Miss Sinclair," rejoined John gently. "Let me help you out, the horse doesn't stand well."

But Jean had jumped lightly to the ground and stood, smiling brightly—a compelling little figure with shining dark eyes. She wore a suit of the freshest pink linen, and a wide, rose-betrimmed hat, shading well down over the dark hair which would insist upon thrusting itself out in wayward little curls from under its modest, sheltering brim.

"The minister do look glad to see her, for sure," commented Gumpsey." I wonder who she can be! Likely its some of his own folks—*but more like it's not!*" he added, thereby proving that "the man with the hoe" is by no means lacking in wisdom and discernment.

"Oh, no, please don't let us go in, unless you wish. Won't you show me your garden? How lovely it is!" Jean was saying.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Miss Sinclair,"

said John in a suppressed voice, as he guided her past the heavily-laden bushes of golden-glow and the tall gladioli which craned their necks and lifted their bold faces in curiosity, to see who had come to walk by the side of the minister in his own garden, and share with them his interest and admiration.

"When did you return?" he continued, trying to steady himself. "I had not heard. . . ."

"Just a couple of days ago, Mr. Matheson," interrupted Jean. "I landed on Friday. We had such a wonderful trip, and Aunt Laura is so much better that I felt I must run down for a few days to see Helen and the baby. Isn't he a darling, Mr. Matheson? Of course, you have seen him often! I could hardly wait. . . !"

John was well content to walk, speechless, by her side, as she enthused over the wonderful mental and physical development of Angus, number two.

"But I'm doing all the talking! I hope I'm not interfering with your plans in any way. Possibly you were just going out! There was really no reason why I shouldn't have gone with Dr. Rolston."

"There was *every* reason, Miss Sinclair. Forgive me if I appear lacking in hospitality. I—I did not expect to see you—I live a quiet life here," blundered on John. "I—I. . . ."

"Oh, I see! And you do not care to have your quietness broken in upon—quite natural, too." assented Jean, "but I can assure you it will not occur often. You can be as quiet as you like again, very soon," and Jean's eyes were lifted to his, reproach-

fully, a suggestion of unshed tears in their dark depths.

Almost John Matheson lost his head. A swirl of emotion swept over him, and all was blotted out in heaven and earth but the one sweet, upturned face. Pulling himself together with a strong effort that made him tremble, he answered in a voice tense with feeling:

"Do not tempt me to tell you what would not make for your happiness."

"I wouldn't dream of tempting you to disclose any of your hidden secrets—not for worlds! But, you see, I don't just understand how you can judge what would best make for *my* happiness," and Jean turned to him with a questioning expression. "Won't you allow me to judge for myself?"

John's face was very pale. He was absorbed in the problem of how to control his struggling emotions and keep them from breaking into passionate speech, as he gazed down upon Jean more tenderly and earnestly than he knew.

"Forgive me, child, if I've hurt you—for, indeed, you are little more than a child to me. . . . ."

"But I *am* more than a child," protested Jean. "Be it known to all men that I am a woman of twenty-seven summers, and—and unnumbered winters! Why will you always introduce the subject of age—either of your age, or mine—just when our conversation is moving comfortably along, and we seem in a fair way to become good friends? As if age mattered in the least! There, now I've inter-

rupted you! I'll be happy to hear you discourse upon *any other subject* you like to choose. Now, please go on and talk, won't you?" she added, coaxingly. "The field is wide. You must have other topics of conversation upon which you can enlarge freely, and which will not effect you to such deep melancholy," peeping up at him from under her long lashes.

"I am very old, child;" stammered John, scarce knowing what he said.

"Indeed! I should never have suspected it," commented Jean sweetly. "Pardon me—but your remarks call forth personal reference—you really are remarkably well preserved," her eyes sparkling mischievously. "I have a great veneration for age," she added solemnly

"I don't want your veneration," ejaculated John, rudely.

"Oh, you're very outspoken! Perhaps I might explain! I didn't think of offering it just at the present time, but as the years roll on I trust you may prove worthy of it. However, I would suggest that you adopt a less abrupt manner—shortness of speech is fatal to succes in the ministry.

"Oh, forgive me, Miss Sinclair—Jean—" he went on, in a quiet voice. "I dare not say what I would, it would not be honorable," and his pulses thrilled, but he was not to be moved from his purpose.

If I didn't know for a fact that the story of the other woman who wouldn't live in the country had

no foundation whatever, I could understand him better, thought Jean to herself.

"I want to tell you that—that your presence in my garden has made me very happy," and John's hand rested for a moment upon the small round arm, as he gazed at her in a vain attempt to search the face hidden by the drooping hat.

"They do seem to be fair took up with one another," commented Gumpsey, glancing out from the tool shed. "To be sure the minister's no more'n a man after all—his head, like as not, bein' no better screwed on where women folks is concerned than ordinary men's, though I will say I never heard tell of him bein' special took up with any one of them afore!"

Having delivered himself of this piece of wisdom, Gumpsey decided to go to the woodshed for the axe. He moved at a slow and dignified pace, skirting round in order to escape the vigilant eye of the wife of his bosom, who rather suspected him of killing time, and had no hesitancy in revealing her convictions to him when ever he came within sight of the kitchen door.

"How beautiful your late roses are, Mr. Matheson! Those exquisite pure white ones remind me of dear little Angus! Please, don't trouble to cut them for me—" but already John had snipped off a luxuriant bunch of his most perfect ones.

"Oh, thank you so much—they are beautiful," and Jean buried her face in their fragrant depths. "Here is the sweetest little bud—let me give it back

to you, Mr. Matheson. It would be so becoming to you if you could see your way clear to wear it! Do, please accept it as a mark of my—*veneration* for you in the years to come!

John took it from her hand, and as he did so their eyes met. "Thank you," he said, "I will value this more than you can ever know. I dare not tell you—"

"Why?" murmured Jean, a lovely light illumining her face.

"Because—*because your happiness is dearer to me than my own!*"

"Well, now! if this don't beat all," interrupted Mrs. Gumpsey, who had that moment espied them, and lost no time in coming forth to welcome the stranger. "If it isn't Miss Sinclair, herself! Why, I never knowed you was home from over the water," she said, shaking Jean's hand heartily. "Come in to the manse and set down until I steep you up a cup of tea! Come away in, Mr. Matheson, don't keep the child standin' out there. It's turnin' to fall, and September ain't the same as May—which I told my neice on Gumpsey's side, who was took up with the idea of marryin' a man that was full ten years older than herself. Where's your cap, Mr. Matheson? You'll take a cold in your head as will leave no room in it for your Sunday's sermon, though I will say you've a heavy paddin' of hair for a man of your age."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Gumpsey," interrupted Jean, graciously, "I won't be able to come in this

time. Dr. Rolston is going to take me back to Bloomfield. He will be here very soon now, and the horse is so restless that he will not stand a minute. I'll be glad to come again—that is, if Mr. Matheson will invite me," glancing brightly towards him. "I'll never forget what a good dinner you prepared for us the last time!"

"To be sure the minister will ask you, child, though I will say he never was one to be took up with women folks' company—be they young or old."

"He's missed a liberal education, I fear," responded Jean, with a merry glance at John.

"Now you speak of it, Miss, that's just where the trouble lies, If he wasn't so took up all the time with gettin' more eddication, he could have got a woman of his own long before now—him only half tryin'," and Mrs. Gumpsey sighed prodigiously over the wreck John had made of his life.

In vain did Jean endeavor to compose her features into an expression of sympathy. Her merry laugh rang out as she caught John's eyes.

Dr. Rolston, who had driven up to the manse gate and was trying to make the horse stand still long enough for Jean to jump in beside him, found his task very difficult, and the farewells were rather abrupt and disjointed.

"Thank you so very much, Mr. Matheson—I've had a lovely time. I shall be so careful of my roses. Come over soon—*very* soon and see my travel pictures, won't you? 'Art is long and time is fleeting,' you know, and the infirmities of age are

fast creeping upon you. I wonder when that horse is going to stand still! He has passed me twice already. There, he's coming at a more sober pace now. Listen! Dare I offer advice to one whose *wisdom*, if not *years*, so transcends mine?

" 'Count time by heart throbs; not in figures on a dial!' "

In a moment she had mounted lightly into the seat beside the doctor, and with a merry glance and a wave of her hand, she was gone.

Chapter XXIV

THE ACCIDENT

"There are times which try men's souls."

JOHN turned and walked slowly back to his garden as one in a dream. Pausing before the white-rose bush, he bent down and tenderly disentangled a small rose-laden branch which had been hidden in the leafy foliage.

"How innocent and childlike she looked as she stood here in my garden! 'Count time by heart throbs,' did she say? Then am I ageing fast?" said John, with a tender smile, as his hand sought the white rosebud she had given him and he gently smoothed its velvet petals.

"I do declare, I've done the lookin' after the garden here for ten years, and I never knowed the minister to wear a bouquet in his buttonhole afore! It's fair unseemly and unfittin', so it is," commented Gumpsey, as both he and Mr. Matheson became suddenly aware of some unusual stir and excitement in the village street.

Women, with small babes in their arms and their sleeves rolled high, rushed from their cottage doors, some turning back as they reached the corner with their faces buried in their aprons. Others were wringing their hands and crying openly, their little

children clutching at their skirts in wide-eyed wonder.

"There must be something the matter," volunteered Gumpsey, awakened to a mild interest. "Hi! there, sonny! what's wrong," he called to a small boy who was first around the corner.

"The doctor's horse shied and throwed him and the lady what was ridin' with him out. He ain't hurt so bad but the lady's killed dead, and they're carryin' her into Billy Wilkins' house. The doctor's all gone white but they helped him into the drug store. Hurry up if you want to see them carryin' her—they're comin' round the corner now—"

Before John Matheson could grasp the meaning of what he had heard, a sad procession appeared round the turn of the road. Two men were carrying a small, limp, pink figure, with black, unbound hair hanging in rich profusion and kindly veiling the still, white face. A gentle breeze had caught the shining strands, and in tender sympathy placed a dark, silken curtain before the closed eyes.

John Matheson, with bared head stepped forward, his faculties benumbed as a swirling blackness passed before his eyes—

"Do I understand an accident has happened to Miss Sinclair? *Not dead!* No! *That cannot be!*—Why, she was here with me in my garden not ten minutes ago—I gave her white roses. See! Here they are now, clenched in her hand—let no man remove them! Uncover your heads, men!" and John stumbled unseeingly forward to where Jean

lay on the green grass, the white flowers resting on her quiet bosom.

" 'In the midst of life we are in death'," pronounced the minister in a low, tense voice.

Dr. Rolston, returning with difficulty from the nearby drug store, beheld the company standing with bared heads, and caught a few low-spoken words.

In an instant he was at John's side.

"Mr. Matheson, what are you saying?" He interrupted, firmly. "You are ill!"

But he brushed the doctor aside . . .

" 'And there shall be no more death—neither sorrow, nor crying—' "

Strong man as he was his voice broke. The women were crying bitterly and the men whispering, quietly, in awed groups.

"Mr. Matheson,—John! Rouse yourself!" and the doctor took him firmly by the shoulder. "You are ill, man! The shock has upset you. For God's sake don't hinder me in my work! She is not dead —not yet!"

"*Not dead?*—Not dead! did you say? Does she still live? Is there hope? Don't trifle with me!" and he caught the doctor's arm in a tight grip, while his eyes searched his face.

"Yes, yes!" the doctor assured him in a faint tone, as his own weakness almost overcame him.

"Thank God! She lives!" breathed John, recovering himself. "Stand back, men!" he spoke,

in a voice of command, and lifting the unconscious girl in his strong arms, he bore her tenderly to the nearby cottage of Mrs. Wilkins.

Gently he laid his precious burden upon the soft, white bed.

"I'm very sorry, Doctor! I hope I've not delayed you in your work. I have been rather closely at my books of late. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Not just now," returned Dr. Rolston, "but will you wait in the next room—I may need you, later."

"Save her life!" implored John, in an agonized whisper, as he turned away from the still, white face on the pillow.

"I will try! I will do my best!" the doctor answered, with sympathetic understanding, as he wrung John's hand.

Soon, all that the doctor could do for Jean was done. He was suffering great pain himself, which he had heroically borne so long as he could be of service. Realizing that it might be some time before she would awake to consciousness he consented, at the urgent request of the minister and the kindly neighbors, to lie down and take a much-needed rest, while Mr. Matheson, unable to be of further service, returned to his lonely manse.

In a short time Angus and Helen arrived with another doctor for consultation. It was found upon examination that Jean's condition, while not serious, would demand nursing and perfect

quiet for some time, and it would not be advisable to move her; while Dr. Rolston was discovered to be suffering from a general shake-up, but would probably be able to be taken home on the day following. The consulting physician suggested that Jean should have a nurse, but unfortunately none was available in the near vicinity.

Suddenly her great dark eyes opened and she turned them searchingly upon Helen as she entered.

"Why—where am I? Is that you, Helen—and Angus, too? What is the matter with everybody—and what am I doing here? Oh, now I remember!" she murmured, slowly. "It was the horse, he was frightened at a kite. Where are my white roses that I had? Oh, thank you, Helen. Let me have them in my hand . . aren't they sweet? . . Lay them beside me, on my pillow . . Am I going to die, Angus? Don't mind telling me. Don't cry, Helen dear! I think I am sleepy," she added, her eyes closing wearily.

For a moment stillness reigned.

"Pray for me, Angus, won't you?—I am too tired. God will listen to you . . . Do you think," she asked, attempting to rouse herself from the lethargy, "Mr. Matheson would come to see me? . . . He will be sorry, I know—he is—very kind . . . " and her voice trailed off into silence.

"He has been here, darling. Yes, yes, he will come again, but you must sleep first," and Helen bent down and kissed her tenderly, with

tear-laden eyes, as she gently tucked the white covering around her friend.

The next day Bessie Grayson arrived, as Helen decided that Jean's recovery would be assured if she had her dearest girl friend to take care of her. When she had suggested sending for Bessie, Dr. Rolston agreed that it would be in Jean's interest, although his face went a shade paler and he insisted upon being moved back to Bloomfield that same evening.

Angus, knowing what the presence of Bessie Grayson would mean to his friend, offered to drive him over and to see that he was made comfortable in his lonely rooms, while Helen watched by Jean's quiet bedside, but first he would call on John Matheson at the manse.

"Well, things are bad, but they might easily have been worse," commented Angus, as later on he and the doctor started on their homeward way.

"Yes!" replied the doctor, feelingly," I am very thankful—I feel greatly to blame. I might have taken old Prince, who would jog along if a mine exploded at his feet. But I have a weakness for spirited horses—I didn't know that this one had a habit of shying at the train. I never could have forgiven myself if Miss Sinclair had been seriously injured.

"Oh, well, cheer up, Doctor! Jean will have the best of care and will be around in a few days, I hope. What about yourself? I say, old chap! I'm awfully sorry that my wife suggested Miss Grayson

coming to nurse Jean—you see, Helen didn't know about—"

"Oh, don't mention it, Mr. MacDonald. I quite understand it was the only thing you could do. I—I—"

"I say, Doctor! Why don't you take a fighting chance? Fate and Helen have done their part to help out! Take my advice—brace up! Go in and win!"

Chapter XXV

THE PATIENT

"The heart can ne'er a transport know, that never knew a pain."

"It was just what I knowed would happen, with that fractious beast, him never keepin' more'n two feet on the ground at the same time, which is a mercy as the sweet young lady with the great searchin' eyes ain't killed outright!" and tender-hearted Mrs. Gumpsey buried her face in her apron and sobbed openly.

"Her lyin' there so still and white, with her little hand out on the bedclothes holdin' on to some mussy old white roses as you give her out of your own garden, which is more fit for the dump heap. They do say as she won't let them be took from her —ailin' folks takin' a fancy to things as they wouldn't set an eye on if they was well and settin' up to their vittles reglar—so they wouldn't."

"Is she—is Miss Sinclair out of danger?" and John, pale but outwardly composed, waited breathless for her reply.

"They scarce know yet. The poor lamb lies that quiet and still with the peacefullest look on her face! They won't allow no one but the folks from Bloomfield to go inside the door which lay

open as I was passin' to the kitchen with a jar of broth which I was takin' to her, which I wrung the hen's neck as was makin' off to set, the minute I heard the dear young lady wasn't killed outright.

"I do declare, Mr. Matheson,"—and the tears coursed down her kindly cheek, unchecked—"she could easy be mistook for a corpse lyin' there, she could indeed."

"For God's sake, woman, be quiet!" and unable to bear any more, John turned away, sick at heart. He could scarce control the compelling force which drew him to the bedside of the sweet young girl whom he loved with all the strength and fervor of his mature manhood, but to whom at the present time he could render no assistance.

His faithful housekeeper, who was, to use her own phraseology, "fair upset and weak as spilt milk," kept him informed, hourly, regarding Jean's condition. He felt he dare not trust himself to return to the house where she lay, for brave as he tried to be, he well knew that he could not meet the eyes of Angus and Helen MacDonald and his heart's secret remain unrevealed.

In the late afternoon a cold, drizzling rain added to the general sadness and depression as the long hours dragged out their weary length.

John sat at his study desk, his head bowed in his hands, while the rain beat against the window panes and the first leaves to fall from the lap of summer blew hither and thither, searching for a quiet spot

where, unmolested, they might lie through the "weary, weary winter days."

"She had asked to keep the faded roses." he mused, "and he had let her go and never told her of his love for her. Now—now, it might be too late! God forbid!" he breathed. "Poor, little, broken child! 'Count time by heart throbs,' she said to him,—her last words, as she mounted so lightly into the seat beside the doctor, and then, she had waved her hand to him, and smiled brightly with that winning look in her dark, wistful eyes, which was ever his undoing. If he had only felt that he dare honorably tell her—"

The door opened gently and Angus MacDonald, seeing John Matheson sitting with bowed head, entered quietly. Hearing the muffled steps, John jumped from his chair, pale to the lips, and facing Angus, his eyes demanded the truth.

"She is not dead! Do not tell me—"

"No, no! She is better, John. There is nothing serious—that is—"

"Thank God!" John Matheson breathed, as he sank into a chair, his head bowed in silent thanksgiving, while Angus, with great compassion and understanding, read his friend's heart story as an open page.

"I am sorry you have seen my weakness, Angus. I—I—"

"Not you weakness, John—your strength! Give me your hand, old chap. Cheer up! Something tells me that everything will work out all right," and as

Angus gripped his hand, John felt renewed hope and confidence inspired within his breast.

"Jean is not seriously hurt," continued Angus, but the doctor has ordered perfect quiet for a few days. She is allowed to see no one but Helen and myself. Miss Grayson, the nurse, comes to-morrow and will look after her. A week's time should see her back with us in Bloomfield if her condition is what we believe it to be. This accident has been pretty rough on Helen, poor girl, but she has borne up well. It's wonderful how these frail little women face up to a situation when the occasion demands it. Well, I must go now and take Dr. Rolston home, and see how my son and heir is progressing. He doesn't seem to appreciate his father's strong points—already he shows a marked preference for his mother's company and has no hesitancy in making it known abroad."

"Yes, yes," answered John, scarce knowing what he said. "How is Dr. Rolston? I hope he is still improving. I will go over to-morrow to see him."

"Oh, he was only just shaken up a little. They were very fortunate to have escaped as luckily as they did. He'll be as good as new in a few days," added Angus, as he rose to go. "You'd better go out for a stiff walk, John; the rain has cleared off, I see. By the way, Jean asked if we thought you would come over and see her when the doctor withdraws his mandate, as you were in the habit of visiting sick people," and Angus busied himself with his rubbers so that he might not meet John's eye.

"I will come," answered John, quietly, his heart singing aloud with hope as he followed Angus to the gate and down the uneven board walk which led to the turn of the street.

"Mr. Maffieson! Mr. Maffieson! wait for me!" and hearing the childish voice John turned, to see little Billy cutting across the field with all possible haste considering the length of his short legs, and the fact that his arms were filled with dripping golden-rod.

"Why Billy! what's all this about? Here, let me give you a hand. What are you going to do with all these weeds, child?"

"They're for the pretty lady what's at our house," explained Billy, panting for breath. "The doctor's horse standed up on his back legs and throwed her out of the buggy. I sawed him do it, myself," and Billy's eyes grew round and awe-stricken at the remembrance. "I was just going to catch him, when he runned away harder than ever. Mother said I must be very still cause the pretty lady was sick, so I just thought I'd better run out and pick some new flowers for her to keep on her bed, cause she likes to have them near her all the time."

"Come home with me, Billy. Come! Yes, bring your flowers. We'll put them in water; you shall take them to your pretty lady," and John lifted the wee laddie, with his dripping golden-rod in his arms, and carried him into the manse.

"It do beat all how fond the minister is of that child to be sure—which is more's the pity he hasn't

olive branches of his own, as the Good Book says," and Mrs. Gumpsey heaved a weighty sigh as she went to the pantry for some gingerbread cookies for the much privileged Billy.

"Yes, I'll read to you about Black Beauty. Oh, yes, of course we'll leave out all the big words, Billy, but come with me first and we'll put the flowers away and take off your little wet coat."

Billy placed his hand confidingly in that of his "Big Chief," while his eyes were lifted, pleadingly, to the minister's face.

"Get the pretty lady when she's better, for me and you to play with, won't you, Mr. Maffieson? Please do!"

"I'll try, Billy," replied John in a grave, earnest tone, as his grip tightened on the little, clinging hand.

"Anyways, if I was big like you, I wouldn't let any one take her from me, so I wouldn't," announced Billy, with firm conviction.

John could not but be amused at the strong position taken by the small, stone-age man.

When Jean awoke from her long sleep she found Bessie Grayson was bending over her. She watched her for some minutes with half-closed lids, as a realization of what had happened stole over her benumbed senses.

"Why, Bessie! how good of you to come," she whispered.

"Hush, Jean; you must be perfectly still," and Bessie laid her cooling hand on Jean's fevered brow.

"I will, Bessie, if you'll stay with me. I feel much better, though. How is Dr. Rolston? He was so kind and unselfish in looking after me when he was worse than—"

"I think he's doing well, Jean," interrupted Bessie. "He has gone home. Mr. MacDonald drove him this afternoon."

"I hope he's not all alone in his rooms, with no one to look after him," replied Jean with grave concern, her voice growing weaker."

"Now, Jean! you really mustn't talk any more—take this little drink of warm milk. There now, you will feel stronger—try to sleep again for a while. Your flowers? Oh, did you want them, dear? Here they are! They were so wilted that I put them in water."

"Might I have them? Give them to me just a minute, please, Bessie! Thank you," and burying her face in their fragrant depths, she breathed deep of their sweetness, and turning on her pillow, slept as a tired child.

. . . . . .

A week had passed since the morning of the accident.

It was a bright, crisp, September afternoon. Jean had been carried into the best room, where she was lying propped round with pillows on an easy couch before a small, open fire, as already there was an early tang of frost in the air.

"Do you know, Jean, that blue silk negligé of

yours is the most becoming thing I have ever seen you wear," commented Bessie, in open admiration, as she brought a little table to the side of the couch and placed some magazines and books within Jean's reach.

"Yes, it is pretty," replied Jean, absent-mindedly. "Aunt Laura bought it for me in Paris. Poor Auntie—I'm so glad you didn't tell her of the accident, it would worry her so. I can write, myself, to-day."

"Don't think I wish to encourage you in wearing negligés, Jean. You must try to rouse yourself, dear, and take an interest in things generally. There's nothing wrong with you physically, the doctor assures us, and I would hesitate to suggest that there might be any mental weakness," added Bessie, as she put some more wood on the fire. "I'm sorry to leave you, but Mr. and Mrs. MacDonald urged me to drive over to Bloomfield to-day with the doctor from Jerseyville. Are you quite sure you'll be all right? Mrs. Wilkins will take the best of care of you and I'll be back in the evening."

"Why certainly, Bessie. I'll be all right. I would feel so much worse if you didn't go. And I want you to see that darling baby. I can hardly wait to see him myself again."

"You will be able to amuse yourself with these books and magazines? Isn't this a beautiful bowl of salvia, Jean? It will add the necessary note of cheer. Let me put it here where you can see it."

"Bessie," said Jean, hesitatingly, "might I—

do you think Mr. Matheson could see me now? Minister's are not counted real visitors, you know."

"I'm sure he could, Jean. I think it would be nice for you to have company while I'm away. He's been so kind, asking for you every day. By the way, what a striking personality he has, and such a nice face. If a minister dare be referred to as handsome I would even go that far. Shall I send Billy over to ask Mr. Matheson?"

Always glad of an excuse to visit his "Big Chief," and especially when it was to serve the pretty lady, whom he adored, Billy's little feet lost no time in covering the ground between his mother's cottage and the manse.

Flying into the sanctum of John Matheson's study hatless and breathless, he announced the purport of his visit.

"The pretty lady wants you to come and see her," he said, pulling at John's fingers, "quick as ever you can!"

"Are you sure, Billy?" John enquired eagerly, scarce able to control his voice.

"Yes, the nurse said to tell you to come because she's going to see a new baby, and I've got to go out to the bush with Tom Peters to see if there's any beech nuts this year."

Coming closer to John and putting his little head on John's strong arm, he looked up pleadingly into his face.

"What is the trouble, Laddie?"

"I'm so afraid," replied Billy, in a sad, dejected

tone, they're going to take our pretty lady away, and I'll be so lonesome," and the big, round tears filled Billy's baby eyes.

"She tells me such lovely stories, all about ogres that eat little boys up," and, nothing daunted, Billy shivered happily. "She don't mind a bit, either, if my boots are muddy and I muss up her pretty dress! *Do get her for us*, won't you. Please—*please!*" and the little arms stole round John's neck, in loving, trustful confidence in the ability of his 'Big Chief' to grant his request. "I told her you were going to try to get her!"

"What did she say, Billy," whispered John, as he lifted the innocent little laddie to a proud position on his shoulder, and his heart almost stopped beating while he listened for Billy's answer.

"She didn't say right out if she'd come, but she looked glad about it, and I think she'll come alright if you ask her nice. I've got to go now," announced Billy, as he clambered down from his point of vantage and, picking up his cap, rushed out the door.

"She sent for me," mused John happily. "Poor, lonely little child! I can no longer conceal my love for her, but I must be fair to her. I dare not risk her happiness by asking her to be the wife of a minister of mature years," he added with a sigh, and his heart sank within him.

A little later, taking his hat, he went out into the garden and gathered the last white roses of summer that he might carry them to Jean.

"The minister do seem to be special fond of that

white rose bush, to be sure. There he goes, snippin' them off to the last bud. He's takin' them to the pretty little lady as was talkin' to him in the garden afore the horse throwed her. *He's took with her*, or my name ain't John Gumpsey, which it is," and having given utterance to his views, Gumpsey felt free to retire leisurely to a garden bench in a secluded corner and smoke a pipe of peace.

John Matheson was met at the cottage gate by Mrs. Wilkins, who had been suddenly called out to see a sick neighbor. She directed him to the cheery front room where Jean lay.

"I'm so sorry, but will you excuse me, Mr. Matheson? Miss Sinclair has insisted upon my going, as poor Mrs. Grange has taken one of the violent attacks of pain to which she is so subject. I have always been able to relieve her as I know just what to do."

If John felt any satisfaction at the prospect of spending an hour alone with Jean, his facial expression, or manner of speech gave no indication, but it can be truly said that he laid no barrier across the widow's pathway.

Rather did he speed her on the way to the bedside of her friend.

Chapter XXVI

JOHN MATHESON'S CALL

"Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
And men below, and saints above;
For love is heaven, and heaven is love."

JOHN MATHESON entered the widow's humble cottage with quiet tread, lest he rudely disturb her who was within, and rapped gently at the closed door of the parlor.

"Come in, please! Oh, is it you Mr. Matheson? It is good of you to come; you will excuse my not getting up, won't you?" and Jean held out her hand to him in gracious welcome.

John took it in his great, sheltering palm, but no word came to him as he gazed tenderly down upon the sweet, pale face lit up by the dark, wistful eyes.

He laid the white roses on the cover of her couch.

Without a word, she lifted them up and placed them upon the white pillow beside her.

"How lovely they are, Mr. Matheson! Just like the ones you gave me that day, so long ago, when I walked with you in your garden," and Jean's voice was low and sweet.

"Yes, I remember," replied John in a voice which he hardly recognized as his own, so far away and unreal did it sound.

"Won't you please sit over here, where you can talk to me?" continued Jean quietly, pointing to a nearby chair.

"I can't tell you how grieved I am to see you here, and how anxious I've been about you," said he gravely, as across his face there passed a deep shadow of pain.

"Yes, yes, I'm sure you're sorry," replied Jean, tremulously. "It was so good of you to enquire after me and to send me the books and magazines. My precious little Billy has kept me well supplied with floral offerings, as these jars of golden-rod will testify," she said with a tender smile.

"He loves you very dearly, Miss Sinclair," answered John, in a low voice.

"I—I sent for you to come and talk to me, Mr. Matheson. You don't mind? It's part o your ministerial duty to visit the sick and—and those in trouble, I believe. Yes, of course it is—so it's quite according to the rules and precedents of the Church that you might expect an urgent call of the kind at any time, isn't it?" queried Jean, with a returning touch of playfulness.

"I'm glad to come, Miss Sinclair," said John gravely, and Jean's eyes fell beneath his straight, clear regard.

"Thank you. I—I thought perhaps, you—you wouldn't mind coming," replied Jean weakly.

"*Mind* coming? I've thought of nothing else, night and day. Listen to me! There is something I must explain," and John went straight on in

a voice tense with emotion, not trusting himself to look at the dear face opposite his, lest all barriers be swept away by the tidal wave of his great love.

"I am a minister of the gospel," continued John quietly, "in a country charge. I am fast reaching an age when I may not be in demand as a settled pastor. Younger men will obtain a favorable hearing, while those of more mature years and wider experience will be set aside."

"I know—I understand," interrupted Jean, tears in her voice, as she remembered her father's bitter experience. "But then, you are not old, you see—*and never will be*," she added, smiling bravely through her tears.

John was sorely tried, but with a supreme effort of will he continued.

"As you may have heard through Mr. or Mrs. MacDonald, I decided not to accept the presidency of Harton University. I felt it was my duty to stay and minister to my people, as I believe I have still a work to do here."

"It was what I expected of you. You could not do otherwise," replied Jean, with proud conviction.

"Hush, child! I don't deserve your good opinion of me. I was sorely tempted to desert my post," and John bowed his head in his hands. "Staying here has cost me dearer than you know."

"I'm sorry!" answered Jean simply. "May I ask how?" she ventured, in a low tone, "don't tell me unless you wish to."

"Yes, you may ask!" answered John, fast losing

command of himself under the influence of Jean's tender, questioning eyes. "My staying here has meant that I dare not honorably go to the woman whom I love—God help me!—and ask her to be my wife . . . her happiness is dearer to me than my own."

For a passing moment the silence remained unbroken save for the crackling of the fire, which had suddenly broken into a bright glow.

"Are you sure that your decision will make *her* happy?" breathed Jean, in a low whisper.

Suddenly John turned and looked down upon the dear face. As their eyes met, love flashed its unwritten story in a glance.

"I love you, Jean! I love you as a man loves but once in a lifetime."

"I know you do," answered Jean, simply, "I have known it all the time."

Stooping over her, he folded the little form in his strong arms, and pressed it to his heart with a passionate tenderness.

"Why wouldn't you tell me—John," she murmured.

"Did you want me to tell you, darling," he whispered, as he kissed her hair, her eyes, her lips.

Jean made no answer but twined her arms lovingly around his neck.

"I thought it wouldn't be fair to you, my little love. There are so many others—younger men—more worthy of you," answered John, humbly. "And I am a minister, as your father was, my

darling," and his protecting arms tightened round the clinging, trusting form, and then—"I am not young—my Jean," he added, with a smothered sigh.

"Now, John, listen!" and Jean struggled up into a sitting posture with a healthy return of her natural power of expression. "I have suffered much at your hands on the subject of age. Apparently it's a favorite topic of yours, and—if I may make bold to criticise at this early stage—a most unfortunate and ill-advised one.

"Now, listen, John, once and for all! *I don't care if you're as old as the Pyramids!* Have I made that clear? Secondly, the fact that you're an obscure minister—as you choose to describe yourself, and may, in the near future be on the appendix—as you humbly suggest—moves me not at all! Can't you see, you foolish and perverse old John, that I—I will be on the appendix with you?" and she leaned back once more in his arms with a deep sigh of contentment.

"As if an appendix or anything else mattered," whispered Jean, as he stroked her softly curling hair with reverent tenderness.

"Put your head down John while I whisper. Can you hear? I—I began to be afraid I *never was going to get the call!*"

How he met this humble, tender confession we will leave to the imagination. Sufficient to say that John Matheson walked down the pathway that led to the gate with a buoyant step, and with a great happiness making music in his heart, and

Jean lay back upon her pillow, her eyes tender and luminous, and her soul filled with thanksgiving for the priceless treasure which was hers—the love of a good man, who recognized that his first duty was to serve his God, although it might spell for himself sacrifice and obscurity.

"Dear old John! How little he knows a woman's heart. As if I couldn't be happy with him anywhere, and under any conditions," she murmured, as burying her face in the pure white roses she kissed them tenderly.

"Did you get her, Mr. Maffieson? Did you get the pretty lady?" a shrill little voice cried, and Billy, his pockets bulging out with green beech nuts, appeared suddenly upon the scene and, placing his hand confidingly in John's, looked up into his face with eager expectancy.

"*Yes, Billy, I got her!*" and the minister's face beamed with pride and confidence.

"I thought she'd come if you asked her right," said Billy, with a happy sigh of relief. "We'll take care of her, won't we—*you and me?* I'm taking her all these nuts to make her better."

In a moment, the little legs had mounted the front steps of his modest home and Billy was proudly offering his gifts to Jean, whose admiration for his prowess in securing them from the high trees knew no bounds.

John Matheson walked down the quiet street which led to the manse as in a dream. The glad blood coursed through his veins as he humbly

thanked God, the giver of all good, for the joy and happiness which had come into his lonely life.

Mrs. Gumpsey, from her post of observation at the kitchen window, noted the springing step, and gazed with pride and admiration upon the minister, who was indeed to her a "man set apart."

"The minister do seem to be getting younger every day—he do indeed. I do declare he steps off like a boy in his teens, it bein' known as some men folk is young when they're grandfathers—the same bein' true that some is grandfathers when they should be young, there bein' no one to blame in neither case, all bein' accordin' to nature, as I said to Mary Jane Slimpins whose oldest girl is more than ordinary homely, says I, 'What can't be helped just has to put up with, Mary Jane. You bein' a plain, hard-workin' woman yourself, havin' no beauty to speak of—as shows on the out-side—and yet you got as hardworkin' a man as any woman could ask or git, and who knows but your Amanda—favorin' her Ma as she does, may git one too, providin, of course, she ain't too partickler, as is well-knowed *no woman*, if she wants to git a man of her own, should be too finicky and hard to please'."

Having thus opened her mouth in wisdom, Mrs. Gumpsey returned to her proud task of "makin' pies for the minister as would melt in his mouth—his teeth doin' naught but lyin' idle in his head," as she was wont to add, thus graphically describing the process of mastication.

Chapter XXVII

DR. ROLSTON PRESCRIBES FOR HIMSELF

"There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned."

BESSIE GRAYSON had been driven over to Bloomfield manse by the visiting doctor who was taking Dr. Rolston's practice, and had spent a quiet and happy afternoon with Mr. and Mrs. MacDonald and last, but not least, with baby Angus.

As the afternoon grew to early evening, the baby grew restless and Helen decided that the only hope of establishing peace was for her to take him upstairs to his cot, and persuade him, as best she might, to indulge in "tired nature's sweet restorer—balmy sleep."

"I'll just go out into the garden while you are putting baby to sleep, Mrs. MacDonald. The flowers are so bright and pretty, and they're still growing in such profusion," she added, as she glanced through the window at the glowing patches of color. "How radiant and beautiful the salvia is this year! I'm so fond of it, it invariably carries a message of hope to me."

"The flowers have been very lovely all summer," answered Helen, "but, of course, the early frost

will soon be here. I'm so sorry that I can't go out with you, Miss Grayson, but you will understand, and I'll come out just as soon as I can put my wee laddie to sleep. Won't you have a wrap?"

"No thank you! I'm quite warm like this. I think a nurse becomes hardened to temperature," and Bessie passed out into the garden, her soft dress of clinging white emphasizing the dark, luminous beauty of her face and the tall gracefulness of her form. She walked slowly past the border of purple and pink-hued asters, and paused before a bed of flaming salvia.

So lost in admiration of its scarlet beauty was she that she failed to notice a step behind her until, turning suddenly, she looked into the face of Dr. Rolston, whom she had not seen since the far-off days of their golden friendship.

"Why!—why Dr. Rolston! I thought you were confined to your room, that is I—I am glad to see you better," stammered Bessie, surprised out of her accustomed self-control.

The doctor took her extended hand in both of his and held it until the clear, bright eyes fell, and the rich color mounted to the glossy, black hair, which rolled away in shining luxuriance from the beautifully defined features.

"I just dropped over to the manse to make enquiries about Miss Sinclair," explained Dr. Rolston after a moment's pause, during which both had stood silent before the flaming, rejoicing salvia. "I didn't expect to have the pleasure of seeing you

here, Miss Grayson, and the doctor's tone was very earnest.

How the years had added the lines of strength and character to Bessie's face. She was more beautiful than ever, reflected Dr. Rolston, his heart beating rapidly.

"I was so sorry to hear of your accident, Dr. Rolston," said Bessie, with sympathetic tenderness of voice. "I do hope you are feeling better—"

"I am feeling better—better than I've felt for years—since I last met you here in Bloomfield. Does that mean anything to you, Miss Grayson? Are you *glad?*"

"*I am glad,*" whispered Bessie, with that truthfulness which was characteristic of her straightforward nature.

"Do you mean that, Bessie? Do you realize what it means to me?" and the doctor, his face alight with happiness, caught both her unresisting hands in his and held them willing prisoners.

"I think I do," answered Bessie, with grave sweetness, releasing her hands gently as Mrs. MacDonald appeared on the verandah.

"Listen, Bessie," whispered the doctor, his eyes resting lovingly upon her. "I'm going to drive you home to-night. I have many things to say to you—may I?"

"Do you think you are well enough to come?" she enquired with solicitude, "are you able to come?

"Able to come! Oh, my love, if you only knew!"

"Hush! hush! not now!"

But Dr. Rolston knew well, as he read the brave, true eyes lifted to his own, what his answer would be, as picking a small spray of scarlet salvia, she handed it to him.

He took it reverently, raised it to his lips and placed it triumphantly in his buttonhole.

"Why, Dr. Rolston! I'm so glad to see you able to come over to the manse again. Won't you come in a while and rest? You seem to have met Miss Grayson before?"

"Yes, Mrs. MacDonald, we are old friends," replied the doctor with great warmth of tone. "I'm to have the pleasure of driving her home to-night. Oh, yes, there's no danger whatever. I have a quiet horse now, and I'll ask Mr. Matheson to put me up overnight. That will give me a chance to see Miss Sinclair in the morning," and, judging from his beaming countenance, it was an outing which held for him a strong appeal.

"Of course I've no advice to offer regarding the *wisdom* of such an outing. The conditions seem most favorable. You are a medical man, your companion a nurse, and your objective a manse," concluded Helen with a mirthful sparkle in her eyes as she noticed the expression of sweet confusion upon Bessie's usually calm face.

. . . . . .

In the early evening Bessie Grayson returned to the cottage, entering alone, as Dr. Rolston had driven over to the manse, and as she and Jean looked

into each others faces their heart secrets lay revealed.

"Oh, Bessie dear! I knew by your eyes the minute you came in the door that everything was all right! I have known about it for such a long time—and I felt sure it must come right some time."

"And you, Jean?" replied Bessie. "Your visitor has evidently administered the right tonic! Have you a *personal* knowledge of the healing touch, dear?"

For answer Jean wound her arms lovingly around Bessie's neck. "Yes Bessie, I have! Oh, isn't it wonderful that—that Mr. Matheson should care for me in the way he does—and he is so good and wise.

"He certainly has displayed his wisdom! But—does my memory serve me right I wonder? It seems to me that, upon different occasions, I have heard you vow that, *though all the eligible men in the Church Militant* prostrated themselves at your feet, you would still continue unmoved, it being your fixed purpose to remain unwed all your days *rather than marry a minister!*"

"Most deeply do I regret having taken such a strong position," replied Jean, humbly. "You see, I never could have seen things in that light if—if I had met John before," she said penitently.

"These *Johns have a way of changing a woman's viewpoint*, haven't they, Jean dear?" and Bessie's shining eyes betrayed her own great peace and happiness.

"How good God is to us, Bessie! Isn't it a comfort to know that we can leave the directing of our lives to Him? I only hope I won't be a disappointment to John," Jean added, humbly.

"Not if you go to bed right away and get your sleep, for the doctor says you are not able to go back to Bloomfield for some days yet."

"Oh, Bessie! I'm so glad about you and Dr. Rolston! I'm afraid I've appeared selfish because I'm so happy myself," and Jean kissed Bessie with loving penitence. "Just to think we are both going to live in this peaceful Arcadia of a spot," she murmured drowsily as, turning her head on the pillow, she slept the happy sleep of a tired child.

In the meantime Dr. Rolston had driven up to the manse gate, and the faithful Gumpsey lost no time in taking charge of the horse, having directed the doctor to the study where he would find the minister, who, according to that worthy and observant individual, was "lookin' as perky as if he was gittin' a woman of his own, or got track of a legacy comin' his way—either one bein' mighty comfortin' to old age," sighed Gumpsey with commendable loyalty to his outspoken partner.

John held out his hand in glad welcome to Dr. Rolston.

"Come right in! This is a pleasant surprise. Glad to see you round again, but I'd hardly expected you over so soon. I don't need to tell you that you are a welcome guest," and a glance of sympathetic understanding passed between them. "No bones

broken, or serious injury, eh? You certainly were fortunate to escape so easily! You look as though the experience had added to your happiness and pride of life, instead of leaving you depressed and humbled in spirit.

" I have great reason to look happy, Mr. Matheson," replied the doctor proudly.

"Yes?" interposed John, with sympathetic interest.

"I have won the promise of Bessie Grayson to be my wife—I have loved her for years—ever since I saw her first at her mother's bedside."

"Congratulations, Doctor! With all my heart I rejoice with you."

"The same to you, Mr. Matheson—from what I have been able to gather," and each grasped the other's hand, while their eyes met in mutual happiness and congratulation.

"I wanted to speak to you of Miss Sinclair's condition," said Dr. Rolston some time afterwards, as both sat comfortably before the red glow of the boxstove.

"She is no worse?" interrupted John with quick concern.

"No, no, not that, but her vitality is lowered, and the doctor, who has kept me informed as to her condition, suggests a complete change of scene, preferably a trip to the mountains."

"Yes, yes," answered John, as a "Young Lochinvar" scheme took possession of his imagination.

He would go to her and carry her away in his

arms! So tenderly and lovingly would he care for her that her health would be restored through very happiness.

Having made up his mind to a course, John was not one to be turned aside by a real, or imaginary difficulty.

"That sounds like the solution, Mr. Matheson, if you can carry it out," replied the doctor, encouragingly, when he had heard his friend's suggested plan.

When John proposed that he and Jean be married immediately, and that he carry his little wife away to the mountains until the color be coaxed back to her cheeks, Jean's eyes filled with tears of happiness, and she was well content to lie back in John's great, encircling arms and be comforted.

"Oh, John! I really should wait until I'm ready," she objected, weakly.

"And are you not ready, my darling?" whispered John, as he tenderly smoothed the dark waves of shining hair, burying his great fingers in their clinging coils.

"Oh, yes, John dear, I am ready—I think I have *always* been ready," she added, with sweet confusion, hiding her face from his tender gaze.

Later on in the afternoon Billy entered, just in time to hear the strange doctor's closing words—

"We'll send you off to the mountains, Miss Sinclair. The fresh, crisp air from the hills is just what you require."

In a minute Billy had covered the ground to the

manse, and rushing in he caught hold of John's hand and attempted to drag him to the door.

"Come quick! The doctor man is going to carry away the pretty lady—way off to the mountains where there's *bears*! Oh, please—please don't let him! and Billy openly dashed the tears from his eyes with his little closed fists.

"No, no, son!" replied John soothingly, lifting the tearful laddie up in his strong arms. "No one will ever take her away from us, Billy—*never*," he added, as he folded the tiny boy to his great, honest heart.

"Well, come over quick and get her!" urged Billy, greatly strengthened in faith and much comforted.

"Yes, Billy, *I will*—just as soon as I possibly can!" and his voice was jubilant with happiness and assurance.

Chapter XXVIII

DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

"Thy kingdom come on earth."

GREAT was Helen's surprise when she learned of Jean Sinclair's engagement to John Matheson of Beresford Presbyterian Church.

"I can't believe it—I really can't! However did it happen? Why, I thought you didn't like ministers; that is—" and Helen's eyes were great with surprise and astonishment.

"Well you see, Helen, taking the ministry as a whole, I would naturally hesitate to express myself, but as regards one individual member, I have learned to care for him very much—and it's just possible that eventually my affection may broaden sufficiently to include the whole General Assembly. Oh, Helen dear! I'm so happy—and so undeserving," and Jean's humility was a characteristic which had never heretofore appeared prominently.

"Really, Angus!" affirmed Helen some evenings later in the sanctity of their own home, "I never was so surprised in my life, I simply can't grasp the idea, not even yet!"

"Ah, for once my wife's eyes were holden and it was given unto her husband to prophesy and predict! Neither one of these engagements is a surprise to me! I foresaw both," answered Angus, as

he moved his chair, the better to observe the effect of his statement upon Helen.

"You thought it and never mentioned it to me?" she replied, in a tone that was meant to convey reproach. "Just to think you could be so secretive. I've a good mind not to tell you what Jean and Bessie and I are planning to do this winter to help our husbands. Of course I can't do very much while baby is small, but I can lend my moral support, which you should agree will carry great weight!

"O Angus," she went on, "how I love this quiet little village. I never thought I would have liked living in the country so well, but the people are so kind and unselfish, and so neighborly, that you just feel their goodness, somehow. Just think how lovely they were to us when little Angus was born—I don't know what we should have done without them."

"They were certainly kindness itself, Helen."

"That reminds me, Angus, I read the sweetest little poem to-day, which describes them so beautifully that I could have wept rivers of tears. Here it is! Listen, Angus—I'll just read a couple of verses,

"'The little small-town sympathy, that runs
across the fields,
In blue-checked gingham aprons, and
with flour upon its hands,
That bakes, and brews, and sweeps, and
dusts, that wakeful serves and shields,
The little small-town sympathy that
knows and understands.

"'The little small-town sympathy, that steals
on neighbor's feet
From tiny lamp-lit houses down a maple-
shaded street;
That lends its strength on tear-dimmed ways
its own bruised feet have trod,
The little small-town sympathy—the very
soul of God.'"

"O Angus, isn't that just beautiful?—don't let us ever leave Bloomfield. You're doing such a good work here, and somehow we seem to be very near the soul of things in this quiet little village."

"Very well, Helen, I am well content. I don't think you need have any immediate anxiety regarding our leaving. I haven't been approached as yet in connection with any outstanding city vacancies, but doubtless it's only a matter of time until my name as a preacher and organizer will be noised abroad, and we will be forced out of our seclusion."

"Of course I know that my husband could fill with acceptance the most conspicuous pulpit in the Church," replied Helen, proudly.

"Beyond a doubt, Helen, although it's a fact that is not as yet widely recognized, strange to say!"

"Oh there, I hear baby," interrupted the fond mother, "and this is neither the time nor place to introduce a discordant note. I do hope he won't feel called upon to lift up his voice in protest when

the men are here to-night. What are you having, Angus? A meeting of the session?"

"Oh, no! Just a few coming in to have a little informal chat. Dr. Rolston and John Matheson are coming unless they are unavoidably detained by the patient and nurse at Mrs. Wilkins' cottage! Some of the other church officials may drop in as well, and I'm going to ask John to tell us something of what he has been doing in Beresford. I would like to map out a plan for the winter's work."

"All right, Angus. If I have any reason to suspect that the brethren are not seeing eye to eye, I will introduce cake and coffee at the strategic point in the procedure."

"Well then, I guess you can be prepared—for Simon Snedbeck is coming, and he has the happy faculty of getting things stirred up. Simon is not an enthusiast over advancement along any lines. He shows a marked preference for the beaten track."

"Oh, there's the baby again," interrupted Helen, and soon her voice was heard in soft drowsy lullabies.

"'Sleep, baby, sleep, the Christ-child minds his sheep,
He is the Lamb of God on high,
Who for our sakes came down to die,
Sleep, baby, sleep'."

and little Angus, soothed by the soft tones, slept calmly in peaceful ignorance of present-day methods

of baby management, which would require that he rend the air with his cries until he receive sufficient lung expansion for the evening, after which he would, of his own accord, cease his physical culture exercises and fall into a quiet, unbroken sleep.

The first to arrive at the manse was Mr. Saulter, whose exalted duty it was to educate the youth of the village and surrounding country.

"Good-evening, Mr. MacDonald. I'm aware that I've arrived somewhat early, but I thought there might be a chance for a little chat with you before the others reach here."

"Come right in, Mr. Saulter. Glad to see you! Give me your hat and pull up to the fire—the evening's are getting quite chilly. We'll have an opportunity to air our pet theories before the others put in an appearance. How are things going over at the school these days?'

"We have been pushing hard to put through the medical and dental inspection scheme, but there's remarkable indifference regarding it among the parents—indeed, some of them openly oppose it."

"Yes, I can readily believe it," replied Mr. Saulter. "Improvements are generally termed innovations in the first analysis. You see, Mr. MacDonald, our theories regarding education have changed somewhat, in the last few years. We emphasize the fact now that education is based upon the innate ability of those to be taught, and we believe that children should be studied in order to discover what these powers are—education being but the growth

of capacities with which children are endowed at birth.

"Also, we recognize the fact that the mind is not naturally averse to learning, any more than are the digestive organs to food! You will recall what Rousseau says with regard to child development, 'Do not save time, but lose it . . . if the infant sprung at one bound from infancy to reason, the present educational system would be quite suitable, but its natural growth requires a different training'."

"Yes," replied Angus, greatly interested, "childhood is a time of growth. We are warned to 'hold childhood in reverence,' and be in no haste to judge it for good or evil but give nature time to work. Nature made children first, before she made men—if we hasten maturity, we produce a forced and flavorless fruit."

"That is the viewpoint," responded Mr. Saulter. "There is no doubt that the proper development of mind depends largely upon the proper use of muscle and nerves. As far as possible, I believe in having my class study nature and field geography out in the open. With the aid of their text books they examine the bark of trees, leaves; the pistils, stamens and petals of the flowers; and watch the bees carrying the pollen from bloom to bloom.

"It is wonderful the interest which they take in geography, through examining into rock formations and observing the action of wind, rain and river currents. It does more than teach them those special subjects, it creates in them a love of nature

which will prove to them a source of interest as long as they live.

"It is the same with the study of literature. I do not approve of singling out a fine passage for the sole purpose of breaking it apart—analyzing it, emphasizing the different parts of speech, and examining into the use of a particular word!

"That is necessary to a certain extent, but there is something far and beyond that which we must visualize if we hope to inculcate in the youth of today a love for the best literature, which, after all, is the aim and end of our study."

"I think," replied Angus, "that the idea you have introduced with regard to dramatizing the old stories such as 'Helen of Troy.' and others, will appeal strongly to the imagination of the children."

Here, a ring at the doorbell interrupted the interesting conversation, and John Matheson and Dr. Rolston, followed closely by Simon Snedbeck, entered and were soon seated round the cheerful hearth.

"Well, Simon," enquired the doctor, "I suppose you have come prepared to go in with us on the community scheme! Mr. Matheson has consented to tell us a little of what he has been doing in Beresford. We hope to introduce more happy conditions in our own neighborhood during the coming winter. Of course we can count on your support." Simon shuffled uneasily in his chair. "Why can't you let well enough alone?" demanded he. "I can't see but what folks are hard-working and contented

enough as they are, besides, I don't see what the church has to do with worldly affairs."

"Well, Simon, we won't make a pronouncement until we hear what Mr. Matheson has to tell us," said Angus. "Oh, no! you don't need to stand up—just let us have an informal chat. We may get nearer to the heart of things that way."

"Well, I certainly appreciate the honor of having been called to tell you something of what we have been trying to do in Beresford—but in the first place I want to correct a wrong impression which has gone abroad to the effect that it is my work. *I* did not bring about these conditions, I had a vision for the welfare of the community, but the people helped me to make it practical."

"Yes, yes! We quite grasp the idea. You were practically inactive yourself," interrupted the doctor.

"When I went to Beresford some years ago," resumed John with a smile at the doctor, "I realized the fact that much could be done to broaden the religious, social and intellectual life of the neighborhood, and I believed that the church should be the centre round which these activities should revolve."

"I suppose you met with some opposition in furthering your plans?" asked Angus.

"Oh, yes, but one looks for that—it's a well-accepted fact that in the history of religious or economic life, any departure from the beaten track is looked upon with distrust, and people as

a rule are not hospitable to old truths when in new garb.

"When I introduced the idea of building a hall in connection with the church, where the people could meet together and find good books and magazines, enjoy music and games and have an occasional dramatic entertainment given by themselves, there was considerable opposition.

"However, as is always the case, there were a few who had caught the vision, the idea gained headway and our building was assured. We have tried it out and found it to work well. The people are interested in hearing good lectures by those in a position to speak with authority, and we have had addresses on agriculture, astronomy, social economics and many other topics which were educative to a degree.

"In fact we have debated many of the live problems of the day; for instance, a couple of topics, slated for later on, deal with the position of Russia and Japan in regard to world power; and the problem of which is likely to prove more profitable, mixed farming or special farming.

"We provide wholesome plays that are instructive and possess a strong moral uplift while amusing, and we do not encourage the kind which tend to demoralize by their low form of so-called wit!"

No longer could Simon Snedbeck stand the strain.

During the recital, he had been as one "cabined, cribbed, confined,"—now had he burst the bonds asunder. In other words, he rose to the occasion.

"And will you tell me what all this has to do with the church. A minister is called to preach, to visit the sick and afflicted and 'keep himself unspotted from the world.' If *he* don't set a good example to the people, but is the head and front of all worldly doings, it's laying a heavy burden on the elders to keep the church straight, so it is!"

"That's a fact, Simon," assented the doctor. "I hadn't thought of it in that light until you pointed it out. This magnificent altitude of social and spiritual isolation is going to come hard on a few of us."

Judging from the cheerful expression of at least two occupants of the room, they were not alive to their unregenerate state.

"Go on, Mr. Matheson," requested Mr. Saulter, "I for one am deeply interested in your work."

"Again I must correct the impression that it is my work. My hands would have been powerless without the support of my people. Mr. Snedbeck wishes to know what the course of action, which I have been outlining in a very fragmentary way, has to do with the church! I reply, *it has everything to do with it.* I believe that the great work of the church is to pursue as far as possible a course of *love in action*, as a means of bringing the Kingdom of Heaven into our midst.

"Inasmuch as we interest ourselves in making of the community a place wherein little children and young people may reach their highest develop-

ment, spiritually, mentally and physically, we are fulfilling our mission as a church of Christ.

"Now, I have talked too long—but I just want to congratulate your minister and those interested upon the work which is already under way in Bloomfield. I overheard some of your people wax most enthusiastic over the tennis court and baseball field, and I am glad to know that the women are interesting themselves in school improvements, in addition to many other activities."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Matheson. We are greatly indebted to you for this little resumé of your work. I think we have made a hopeful beginning. It is aways a sure sign of advancement when the women become interested, and it will be no fault of theirs if any suffer privation in this community next winter, for they have already laid by a little fund, and have some clothing in readiness for any urgent cases which require relief."

"Conditions in the village certainly are improving, volunteered the doctor. "The only difficulty I foresee is that my practice will suffer through the effort which is being put forth to forestall disease. Since the women succeeded in introducing more sanitary conditions, and began to look askance at 'the old oaken bucket,' the number of my typhoid-fever patients has diminished to the vanishing point."

"You seem to be resigned to the inevitable, Doctor," said the minister.

"Oh, yes, I realize the fact that there are always

a few victims whose high privilege it is to be crushed under the chariot wheels of progress.

Once more Simon Snedbeck lifted up his voice in protest.

"I've got to speak out! I don't want to be the one to bring it up, but the others won't and I feel it my duty."

"Go on, Simon! Do your duty, cost what it may," encouraged the doctor.

"Well, I heard that a minister whom I could name if I wanted to, wrote a piece about a new religion and had it put in a Church paper. It was a shame that it was printed for it said in so many words, that instead of the Bible being handed down to us all at one time that it was made up of a lot of stories and poetry thrown together and afterwards bound up into one Book. Now!" he added, with grim determination, "I won't stand for that! I want my Bible made, *when* and *how I believe it was made*—and I won't have it made any other way! And for those who teach differently, let them be numbered among the heretics and the unbelievers, which is their proper place."

John Matheson glanced at Angus MacDonald for one moment, and then rose to his feet.

"I fear I am the offender in the eyes of Mr. Snedbeck! As such, I feel I should reply. He evidently refers to an article of mine which appeared in the press some time ago. I do not think that this is the time or place to go into an exhaustive description of how I believe the Bible was made. We

know that the revelation of God's truth began countless years before the Bible, in its present form, was thought of; even before men wrote their first messages in crude hieroglyphics on bricks of clay baked in the sun's rays. We must not close our eyes to the religious, social and intellectual conditions under which these records were made, nor to the fact that many of the Old-Testament stories were told and retold by generation after generation before appearing in united form.

"We can easily understand that discrepancies might readily creep in, owing to the different interpretations of the different translators, nor must we lose sight of the fact that the Hebrew language was not spoken by the people, but used solely by the historians of the time in their task of preserving the sacred documents which form our Bible of to-day.

"There is one thing sure," and John Matheson spoke in a grave and reverent tone, "'In the beginning God created the earth . . . and all that therein is—and the Old Testament proves that religion has been, and is, a progressive force, and the more hospitable we are to truth in whatever garb it may appear, and the more ready we are to adopt new methods which we believe to be a practical application of the teaching of Christ, *the sooner will the Kingdom of Heaven come upon earth*"

For a moment silence reigned, then it was broken by Mr. Saulter,

"I agree with you Mr. Matheson, and I have

heard our own minister speak much in the same way. I believe if we, as a Church and a nation, are to wield a wide-spread influence for good, we must adopt and pursue methods which we believe to be in accordance with His teaching."

"There's one form I would like to see it take in the near future," said the doctor, "and that is a good hospital at Bloomfield, where patients, rich and poor alike, could receive necessary treatment under proper environment. Well, I'm sorry, but I must be going," he added, rising with some difficulty. "Are you coming, Simon?" he enquired, seeing that worthy personage standing, hat in hand.

"*Yes! I am coming!*" announced Simon grimly, "and I want to say right here, I am through with the church and the session! I'll never again set foot inside a church where the minister and his friends encourage false doctrine and stand for what is not orthodox. I'll have the truth revealed in the way I want it, or I won't have it at all!

"I'll have the Bible all written by the same folks and at the same time—and handed down all bound and ready for family worship!

"I'll have the world made in six days, of twenty-four hours each, and finished Saturday night before sun down, so there's no breaking of the Sabbath day neither, and I *won't listen* to those heretics who would have it that it took thousands of years in the making!

"I'll bid you good-night!—and *good-bye!*" and before Angus could reach the side of his incensed

elder the door was banged violently and he was gone.

"Poor Simon, he was not in a receptive mood," explained the doctor, as he and Mr. Saulter prepared to follow. "You are going to put up with Mr. MacDonald over night, I see, Mr. Matheson. Well, I suppose before morning you will have thoroughly discussed all the live issues of the day, besides getting in somewhere back of creation, and ferreting out hidden truths."

Angus shook hands warmly with his departing elders, and again joined his friend at the fire.

"I am more than sorry about this, Angus," said John, as they drew up closer to the blazing logs. "Do you think your elder will leave the church?"

"Yes! I think he will," answered Angus, gravely. "That's just the difficulty that ministers are always up against! We are conversant with the accepted truth regarding the formation of the Bible, but just how much of it we should make known to our people is a problem with which we are confronted. If Simon Snedbeck and the class to which he belongs believe, and are content with the interpretation to which they cling, how far are we justified in interfering with their beliefs?"

"I see!" replied John Matheson, with slow deliberation, "but then, on the other hand, there is a reading and thinking element of our congregation. As regards that element, how far are we justified in holding our peace?"

A musing silence reigned in the quiet room.

"There is one thing sure. God is the same—*Infinite—Eternal*—and *Unchangeable*. Throughout the march of the centuries He has never ceased to reveal His beauty, truth and goodness.

"Do we ask how?" continued John, as though speaking to his own soul. "Through the long line of prophets and reformers—through the best in literature, in art and in music (which are in themselves a revelation of God to man)—yes, and through the life of Christ, spent in ministering to mankind, do we discover an undying message, and we believe that if preacher and people alike endeavor to follow in the footsteps of One whose days were spent in loving service, any problem may safely be left, until solved by the searchlight of eternity."

Chapter XXIX

LOVE IN ACTION

"Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."

A QUIET morning marriage took place at Bloomfield manse a few days later, at which Jean's Aunt Laura, Bessie Grayson and Dr. Rolston were the only guests.

Angus MacDonald united John Matheson and Jean Sinclair in the holy bonds of matrimony, and a few hours later the happy bridegroom carried his bride away to a quiet place among the hills, where the leaves lay in heaps of crimson and gold at their feet, and where they could gaze far away at the everlasting hills which rose in tiers of gorgeous-hued livery as far as eye could see.

"Do you know, John, those hills remind me of you," remarked Jean, her eyes resting in love and admiration upon her husband's face.

"Why, little one?" enquired her husband tenderly.

"Because they cannot be moved," replied Jean. "Do you know you've sat here for five minutes by my watch—absolutely speechless! Are you happy, you dear old sphinx?"

" 'I were but little happy if I could say how much'," replied John with a smile, as putting his

arm round his wife he drew her gently to his side.

"I understand, John," answered Jean. "Just be as quiet as ever you like, but keep on thinking nice things—I am well content," and she breathed a deep sigh of relief and happiness.

. . . . . .

Bessie Grayson returned to her duties immediately after Jean's wedding, but the New Year was to see her settled across from Bloomfield manse, in a large, many-gabled house which the doctor had secured, and around which he decided to plant innumerable beds of salvia, for their red glow would ever remind him of that early September sunset when, in front of their flaming beauty, he had again met Bessie Grayson and his life's happiness had been assured.

"Well, I will say I was never so took back in all my days! Who'd a thought of the minister marrying the pretty little lady with the great coaxin' eyes and the sweet ways as most pulled the heartstrings from out of your body." commented the devoted Mrs. Gumpsey for the hundredth time.

"If it be the minister you're talkin' about," returned her long-suffering partner, "I sensed it when he stripped every bit of bloom off the white rose bush and handed it over to her."

"Which you'd have been better employed tendin' to the garden, and not interferin' in matters as you don't know nothin' about—you bein' a well-enough meanin' man, and not over-to-blame for

bein' short on brains as was give to your wife instead.

"Go to your work! It's well knowed that there's lots to do about the place, gittin' things set in order for the minister and his new missus, as will be comin' back before I git the fall cleanin' done, and the fruit lyin' rottin' on the ground for want of hands to do it up. Well! Well! It do beat all!" and, notwithstanding the stress of duties which awaited her, Mrs. Gumpsey sank down in a chair, mopping her face with a corner of her snowy-white apron, and gave herself over to reflection.

"I would never have took him for a marryin' man, but it's gospel truth, it is, after all, ministers will be men just like other folks."

She heaved a deep sigh. "There's no denyin' it—him having gone so far through the woods, as it's a mercy he didn't pick up a crookit stick at last, instead of the sweet young lady as my heart went out to the first time she came and spoke so polite about the dinner—it bein' 'just perfect,' she said—them bein' her very words, when she'd eaten so dainty-like of the food as I'd cooked up.

"Well, *I'll do my duty by her*—I will indeed," she announced to herself, with firmness of purpose that nothing could shake. "It's the Lord's mercy as she wasn't killed outright before she ever got the minister, instead of bein' spared to be his *relic*, which she's like to be accordin' to nature, him bein' older nor her! Though I will say it's more satisfyin'

to most women folk to be a man's *relic* than nothin' at all!"

Having reached this sage conclusion, the great-hearted housekeeper proceeded with her labor of love—reducing the manse to a state of spotlessness ere the homecoming of the minister and his bride.

Indian summer had again spread its purple haze over the broad, fruitful countryside.

It was early evening, and Angus MacDonald had been away since early morning looking after the interests of his people in an outlying section of the field.

Leaving little Angus sleeping peacefully in his small white cot, Helen threw a light silk scarf over her head and walked slowly down the garden path to the gate to watch for her husband.

Angus, wheeling homeward in the distance, caught sight of the well-loved figure and hastened his speed. Jumping off his wheel as he neared her side, he drew her to him and kissed her tenderly, his face beaming with joy and peace.

"Anything wrong, little wife, or are you just out to meet your husband? How is my proud offspring?" he enquired, with fatherly solicitude.

"O Angus! I could hardly wait to tell you! What do you think? He actually said your name to-day—'Dada'!"

"He did, eh? Well! I'm sure I feel honored to have been singled out for special mention. Do you suppose it was clear in his own mind to whom he had

reference?" queried Angus, teasingly, as they entered the cheerful living room.

"Of course it was perfectly clear, Angus! How absurd of you to suggest otherwise! But I have such a surprise for you—you would never guess!" and Helen opened her desk and took out a letter addressed to her in a bold, business hand.

"You remember the man who stayed with us the night before baby was born?"

"I remember well," answered Angus, with grave emphasis, as his mind reverted to his tussle with the heavy double blankets. "Poor Joe Belton! I often wondered what became of him."

"Well, Angus, this letter is from him, and it's to me. Just see what fine business paper it's written on. You sit down by the fire while I read it to you—I never was so surprised in my life. Listen:—

"'Dear Mrs. MacDonald:-

"'You will wonder that I should have the temerity to address you, knowing me as you did when I was on the verge of despair and ruin through drink, which was entirely responsible for my downfall.

"'My heart goes back to you and to your husband in deep gratitude and thankfulness for the helping hand which you stretched forth to me in the hour of my extremity. Especially am I grateful to you, Mrs. MacDonald, for your sweet sympathy and loving encouragement.

"'At your touch, new life seemed to flow through my veins—I had a distinct feeling that virtue had

entered into me. It was years since I had felt the touch of a pure, tender-hearted woman's hand. Then and there I resolved to begin anew.

"'I returned to Montreal, where for a number of years I had practised law successfully, until the craze for drink overcame me. My wife, who was no longer able to live with me, returned to her father after our little four-year-old daughter had passed to the Great Beyond.

"'Notwithstanding all, I still have influential friends who believe in me, and they have assisted me in once more gaining a foothold, where, by God's help, I hope to make good, and perhaps in after years I may be permitted to go humbly to my wife and tell her of my repentance, though well I know it is too late to atone for the suffering and sorrow which I have brought into her life. Yet, God knows!—I loved her then, and I love her now!

"'I saw by the papers an announcement of the birth of your little son. I pray that he may grow up to be a blessing and honor to his father and to his mother.

"'To you, Mrs. MacDonald, I owe my fresh lease of life and my regained manhood.

"'I pray that God may bless you and yours abundantly, and that sorrow may ever pass by your door.

"'Yours, in deepest gratitude,

Joseph Belton.'"

A business card accompanied the letter, bearing the following inscription:—

Braxton, Brown & Belton,
Lawyers & Solicitors,
40 St. Catherine St. W.
Montreal, Que.

"Oh, Angus! just to think of it—supposing we hadn't been kind to him!" and Helen's tender heart melted with compassion, while tears of thanksgiving filled her eyes.

"Of course, *I* don't really deserve the credit of it, Angus,—it was you, who were so good to him—and helped him. I—I only—"

"*No, no!* Helen," interrupted Angus, as he gazed upon the sweet face of his young wife with mingled tenderness and reverence, "this bright, particular star will shine forever in the *Crown* of the *Minister's wife!*"

THE END

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